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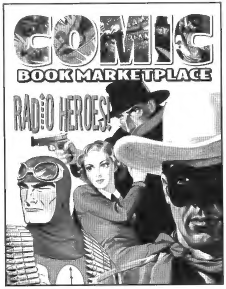

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The Evolution of a Collector III

In last month's editorial, I discussed how my Obsessive-Compulsive tendencies carried me through to my PhD degree in Physics, and on to the position of chairman of the Physics Department at Drake University in Des Moines. Drake encouraged all professors to attend national professional meetings, and starting in February 1965 I attended the annual meeting of the American Association of Physics Teachers in New York City.

One of the reasons I wanted to go to New York was to meet with Bill Gaines. Since discovering comic-collecting "fandom" I had been writing to Bill, and he invited me to have dinner with him when I was in New York. For several years in the late 1960s, every February I would travel to New York for the Physics convention and spend most of my time at the *MAD* offices at 485 Madison Avenue. Over these years Bill and I grew closer as friends. Once when we went out to dinner, I said to Bill, "Bill, those EC Comics of yours were the greatest. Why don't you put them out again for a new generation of readers?" Bill said, "No way! I'm doing great now with *MAD* and I don't need the grief that reissuing those comics might cause!" Then he paused for a few beats and added, "Why don't you do it?"

Later, sitting on the plane back to Des Moines, I thought, "Yeah, why *don't* I do it?" At that time, Woody Gelman was in the process of publishing the hardcover book, *The EC Horror Library*, and Bill had pulled some of the EC artwork to be shot for Woody's book. Sitting in Bill's office, I remember looking at the original art and marveling at how great it was, and how the artists seemed to put details in the art that they knew wouldn't show up in the cheaply-printed comic books. I remember thinking how I wish all EC collectors like me could see this original art in all its glory. This thought led to my first publishing venture, *EC Portfolio One*.

After getting my feet wet with the *EC Portfolio* series, I made the decision to go "whole hog" by starting the publication of the Complete EC Library, which was, as far as I know, the first time that anyone attempted to republish the entire output of a comic book company. At the same time, I resigned my tenured position at Drake and returned to my home town of West Plains, Missouri to begin my second career as a publisher of comic art.

As my collecting interests broadened, I started collections of comic books other than ECs, original art, Sunday pages, etc. I became more of an accumulator than a collector. Before long, in addition to my complete set of EC comics, I had several thousand other comic books, hundreds of complete comic sections from the Sunday papers of the 1930s and 1940s, a large collection of original comić art, including paintings by Frazetta and Barks, and countless other collectibles related to the comics.

[*to be continued*]

Russ Cochran
Editor & Publisher

Russ

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S.C. RINGGENBERG, BHOB STEWART
JOHN STUART JR, MIKE WILBUR
Contributors

PRICING & MARKET REPORTS
ROBERT M. OVERSTREET
Senior Pricing Editor

MICHAEL NAIMAN
Market Reports Editor
mnaiman1@cox.net

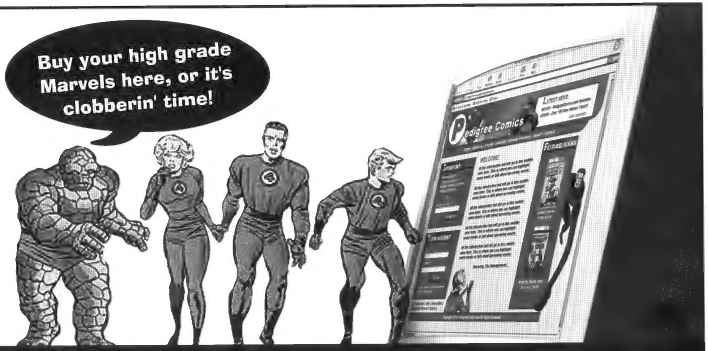
MARK HUESMAN
Pricing Coordinator
feedback@gemstonepub.com

ADVERTISING
ANGELA MEYER
Traffic & Operations Manager
ec@gemstonepub.com
Toll Free (800) 322-7978

BRENDA BUSICK
Creative Director
bbrenda@gemstonepub.com

RESEARCH
JOE McGUCKIN
mjoe@diamondgalleries.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE & ADMINISTRATION
JUDY GOODWIN
Customer Service Manager
cbm@gemstonepub.com
Toll Free (800) 322-7978
Or (417) 256-2224



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CGC Five Years Later

interview by Dawn Mortensen

As Comic Guaranty, LLC (CGC) celebrates its fifth anniversary this month, it must be acknowledged—whether you're a fan of certification or not—that CGC has made a huge impact in the comic world in a short period of time. GCG has graded more than half a million comics in the past five years, influencing comic prices and demand in a way that has pleased the individual collector and dealer, but angered those who were trying to rip off unsuspecting buyers.

CGC's appeal lies in its ability to give equal buying and selling power to collectors across the board—whether expert or novice, big or small. And in early January 2000, when collectors were beginning to wildly embrace online auctions and sales, CGC could not have arrived at a time more ripe for an impartial third-party grading service that could verify a comic's condition, pedigree and restoration status for remote buyers and sellers.

CGC was formed in 1999 from a group of comic fans and entrepreneurs within The Certified Collectibles Group, CGC's umbrella company. Looking for someone honest, extremely knowledgeable about comics, and with good business sense, the group's first hire was Steve Borock. Now, as President of CGC, Borock answers questions about CGC and its five years of growth and influence within the hobby.

Comic Book Marketplace: In your words, what has CGC done for the hobby of comic collecting?

Steve Borock: CGC has spurred a number of positive changes. First, we've become the "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" for the hobby. We've also chased out a lot of bad sellers and set the industry standard that's acknowledged by everyone from *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* to *Wizard*. Second, through our online chat boards and chat dinners at shows, CGC has brought together collectors and dealers who previously wouldn't deal with each other. It's really cool to have 50 people in a room of different ages and interests—from a respected historian like Michelle Nolan to a kid who collects Spawn—but what they have in common is a love of comics and an interest in promoting the hobby. Since CGC doesn't have alliances or take sides, I think we've helped move the focus of the hobby away from personal agendas or politics and back to collecting.

CBM: When *Comic Book Marketplace* interviewed you nearly six years ago as CGC was forming, one common concern was that grading would benefit dealers more than individual collectors. Has this proven to be true or false?

Borock: False. We really leveled the playing field between dealers and collectors. It doesn't matter if you're the top seller in the world. If you put what you think is a 9.4 Silver-Age *Spider-Man* on eBay and the book is raw, even if you are a top-notch dealer with a great reputation you won't get anywhere near the same price as an amateur that posts the same comic certified 9.4 by CGC.

CGC's Steve Borock.

CBM: What percentage of your business comes from dealers, as opposed to individual collectors?

Borock: It's about 50/50. If you take out moderns, it's more like 65 percent collectors and 35 percent dealers.

CBM: What would you say is at the core of CGC's success?

Borock: The integrity is huge. People trust us. It's hard to find professionals that have the ethics and knowledge we do. And people who deal with us see it; they know we just care about the comic books and the industry.

CBM: There are those who have been angry about changes in the hobby caused by CGC. How do you respond to them?

Borock: I find that the guys who are angry at CGC's existence are often guys who were trying to pass off restored books as unrestored. They know that we'll catch any restoration that comes through us. Other dealers think that CGC has taken power and money away from them by leveling the playing field between dealers and collectors, but smart dealers see that there's an advantage to grading—that it's a smarter and safer way to do business.

There are also those who just don't like change. When we first started the grading service we offered $500 worth of free grading to dealers, and there were some who actually turned it down (ironically, those same guys asked if they could take the offer a year or two later—we said no). There will always be those who don't want to move toward the future and who are angry that the future's moving on without them.

CBM: Can you walk me through a typical day at CGC, and how comics move through the grading process?

Borock: We all get in pretty early, because we have a heavy workload. Customer Service and Receiving start returning calls and email, then deal with what we call "Yucks"—books that arrived damaged or without the forms filled out. In the mailroom, Mondays are especially heavy, with Receiving opening packages until eight at night. They check the contents of each package against the forms to make sure everything lines up.

CGC's Steve Borock gets a first look at a comic book submitted for grading.

Meanwhile, the graders are constantly grading books. A restoration detection expert looks at every book. The first pre-grader counts pages, looks at defects, and enters notes about each comic, along with a grade. The second pre-grader is able to see the first grader's notes, but not the grade. He checks the book carefully and enters his grade. Then the finalizer looks at it, grades it, and only then is able to see the other two grades given. If they're different, the finalizer re-evaluates the book or hands it to another senior grader to review.

While all this is going on, Encapsulation is constantly sealing books, and a comic specialist in Quality Control is doing a final check that the right book has been sealed with the right grade. Our shipping manager, Kim, is incredible—she can get out hundreds of comics every day to addresses all over the world. And at every stage, everything's scanned and tracked through a bar code that stays with the comic all through the process.

CBM: How good is CGC at detecting restoration?

Borock: Between myself, Mark Haspel, Chris Friesen and Paul Litch, we have the best restoration detection team there is. Our experience pulls from years of working with comics and checking restoration for auction houses like Sotheby's. Paul's exceptional eye comes partly from his experience as a professional photographer. Chris had his own comics restoration business before CGC. Over the years, some dealers have come back to tell us that they purposefully submitted books with the most slight and hard-to-detect restorations as a "test"—and that we caught every one.

CBM: In the past few years, a number of businesses have sprung up to sell moderns in 9.8 or higher grades. What do you think of the long-term survivability of the CGC high-grade modern market?

Borock: If you look at coins, they started certification almost 20 years ago. For cards, I think it was about 10 years ago. And you'll see there's still a lot of new stuff being graded and certified every day for those collectibles. I think it will be the same with comics. People who got in on the ground floor of the CGC modern market will remain steady. There's a huge demand for high-grade moderns—if there wasn't there wouldn't be seven major players in the field.

CBM: CGC is going to 20 comic conventions in 2005, and offering on-site grading at at least six of these. What role do shows play in CGC's business?

Borock: Mostly, we go to shows to get out into the community and talk with people about our service. We've increased the number of shows where we accept submissions, and on-site grading is really taking off. At the last few shows we offered it, we had to turn people away because we got more books than we could do in a weekend. People like the immediate gratification of getting their books back right away, or having a book they just bought at the show checked for restoration before they bring it home. Others like the idea of handing their comics directly to a CGC professional rather than sending them through the mail.

CBM: What areas would it make sense for CGC to expand into?

Borock: We've just expanded into grading comic book magazines and soon we'll offer grading for regular magazines like *Playboy* or *Time*. We'll also incorporate our Signature Series into the magazine service; imagine getting a current issue of *Sports Illustrated* with the signature of a Superbowl champion on the cover, knowing that the signature was verified in person by a CGC representative prior to grading. But our core business will always be centered on comic books. That's our true love and that's what the company is based on. In every decision we make, we're looking at the long-term and not the short-term. I'm in this for the long-haul. This is a job I want for the rest of my life.

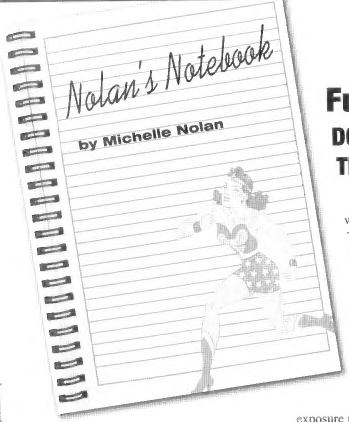
CBM: As CGC expands and as grading becomes increasingly popular with collectors, will you be able to keep up with the demand?

Borock: Guaranteed.

To celebrate its fifth anniversary, CGC is extending a number of special offers on their grading services through the months of January, February and March. Watch for these offers through ads and on the CGC Web site, **www.cgccomics.com.**

Dawn Mortensen is a freelance writer and comic fan based in Santa Clara, Calif. You can reach her at dawn@dawnmortensen.com.

CGC's grading team.



Funny Stuff, Indeed

DC's Hard-to-Find Hilarity: The Dodo and the Frog

The first "slabbed" comic I have ever purchased arrived not long ago. I breathlessly broke open the package, cracked the slab to smithereens, and began to appreciate one of the most wonderful, awe-inspiring four-color rarities ever to grace my mailbox.

There it was, in all its glory: *The Dodo and the Frog* #92 from November 1957, accurately graded at 2.0! Price, $24.95 plus $7.50 postage and insurance.

At last, my collection of the exploits of Fenimore Frog and Dunbar Dodo was complete. The feeling was sweet, indeed, since there are few collecting challenges more daunting in the world of DC comics than acquiring every issue of *Funny Stuff* and its 13-issue successor, *The Dodo and the Frog*.

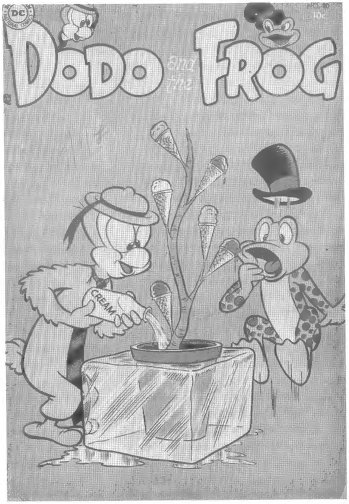
I still need a few early issues of *Funny Stuff*, circa 1944-47, but I'm confident they'll all gradually turn up in low grade some day. I'm not worried. I was quite concerned, however, that I would ever be able to complete my run of *The Dodo and the Frog* #80-92. It was one of the funniest comic books ever produced—and remains one of the most difficult runs to find among numerous uncommon short-run series from the DC of the 1950s, then known as National Comics.

The Dodo and the Frog, which ran in *Funny Stuff* #18-79 and *Comic Cavalcade* #30-63, is perhaps the least appreciated of DC's pairings of anthropomorphic antics. Everyone loves artist Jim Davis' utterly zany The Fox and the Crow, which DC produced for more than two decades beginning in 1945, including in three regular titles from 1949-54—with exposure rivaling that of Superman! Flippity and Flop, which ran 47 issues for nearly a decade beginning late in 1951 and appeared in other titles as well, was surely the finest rival of Tweety and Sylvester, and just as good in its own right.

In the strip's original incarnation, The Dodo and the Frog lasted merely a decade (1947-57), but it deserved a much finer fate. You can't read these cautionary tales of the lovable but dumb dodo and the all-too-often-much-too-clever frog without laughing often. The Fox and the Crow plus Flippity and Flop always produce more than their share of chuckles, but the only DC series that leads to more light-hearted, laugh-out-loud moments is the 98-issue run of Sheldon Mayer's *Sugar and Spike* from 1957-71.

It took me well over a decade of serious searching to find all 13 issues of *The Dodo and the Frog*. In fact, I still wouldn't have #92 had not an indexing buddy, Dan Stevenson, won it for me on eBay, and at a price only a few bucks over the *Guide* value of $19. Such are the benefits of exchanging "highest priority" want lists!

DC sputtered with the final issue or two for a variety of its titles in the late 1950s and early '60s, perhaps because the company didn't want to waste inventory art the way it did to a



Dodo and the Frog #80 (Sep-Oct 1954), first issue after change from **Funny Stuff.**

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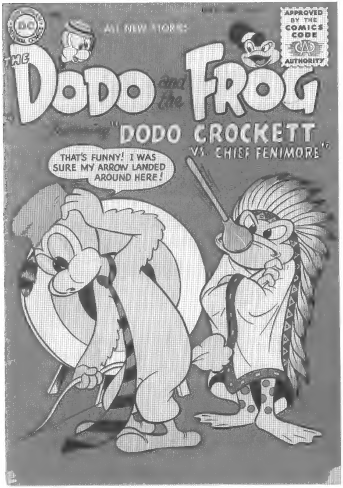
considerable extent in the late 1940s. *The Dodo and the Frog* #92 fell into this category, perhaps explaining why I had never been able even to see one outside the pages of the Gerber *Photo-Journal*, which shows a handful of *Funny Stuff* covers and only one *Dodo and the Frog*—this scarce last one.

That's not to say the other issues are easy to find. According to the bags I left them in, I bought the 13 issues from 11 different sources. This is truly a difficult series to collect, which may be accounted for by the fact that it apparently didn't sell well and thus really lasted only a little more than a year.

The Dodo and the Frog logo overshadowed the Funny Stuff logo on the covers of *Funny Stuff* #77-79, apparently because DC's editors must have thought Dodo & Co. would sell better. The title change became official with #80 (Sep-Oct 1954), but the title enjoyed regular bi-monthly status through #88 (Jan-Feb 1956). The final four issues appeared only on summer newsstands—#89 and #90 were dated September and November 1956, and #91 and #92 were dated September and November 1957. The last two issues contained no advertising other than the publisher's own.



The Dodo and the Frog #87 (Nov-Dec 1955), scarce!!

Sheldon Mayer completists and/or enthusiasts—and there are more than a few fans of the cartooning genius—have despaired over the scarcity of this *Dodo and the Frog* series for years, since Mayer appeared in all 13 issues of *Dodo and the Frog* except for #82 and #91. He did Dizzy Dog in #80, 84, 87, 88; Doodles Duck in #81, 83, 85, 86 and 92; and Bo Bunny in #86, 89, and 90. These three strips—all typical Mayer, which means great stuff—earlier appeared sporadically in many issues of *Funny Stuff* as well.

That may be one reason the series is so tough to collect, along with later issues of predecessor *Funny Stuff*. I've seen more 1940s issues of *Funny Stuff* (through #51, which was the first bi-monthly issue after a long monthly run) than 1950-54 issues (#52-79). That could be because *Funny Stuff* apparently was one of DC's best-selling post-war titles.

Although Dodo and the Frog were yet to appear for another year, *Funny Stuff* enjoyed a unique distinction in DC history early in 1946, after wartime paper restrictions were dropped. It was the only DC title ever to go from quarterly publication (#1, Summer 1944, through #7, Fall 1945) to a monthly schedule (#8, April 1946, through #50, October 1949, before it went bi-monthly). Most comics did not appear monthly in the 1940s, although at about the time *Funny Stuff* went monthly in 1946, DC also returned several of its anthologies to monthly status—*Flash*, *Adventure*, *All-American* and *More Fun* (by then a humor title) to go along with *Action*, *Detective*, *Sensation* and *Star Spangled*.

Not long after Dodo and the Frog debuted in *Funny Stuff* #18 (Feb 1947) and made their cover debut with #19 (Mar 1947), the pair encountered a most unlikely friend—Superman! Before making a hilarious one-panel cameo in #22 (Jun 1947), Superman disguises himself to win a bet for Dodo by beating Fenimore Frog in a jumping contest! Mark Twain would have been proud.

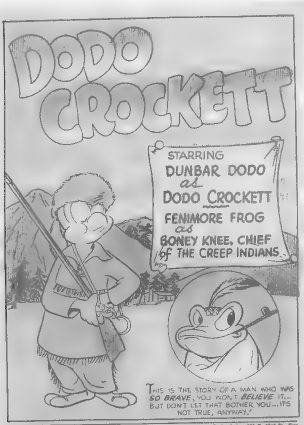
By the by, I recall one Superman completist who was aghast when he learned that his hero had appeared in a Dodo and the Frog story. "Of all the comic books I have had to hunt down over the years, now it's some dumb dodo!" was his reaction. Ah, the price one pays to be a completist!

Every now and then, Dodo and the Frog would star in wonderful parodies of fairy tales and popular culture—stories that were unlike anything else DC was doing with funny animals.

Among the first of these fractured fairy tales were "Dodo-White and the Seven Professors" (#30, Feb 1948) and "Cinder-Dodo" (#33, May 1948). Fenimore Frog wasn't forgotten, though; he fit in perfectly as "The Great Sherlock Frog" (#37, Sep 1948). Shortly after, there was "Dodo of the Mounties" (#40, Dec 1948). I wonder whether the Duck epics of Carl Barks had any influence on these little epics.

One of my favorite satires in comics is "Creep-A-Long Rides Again" (*Funny Stuff* #50, Oct 1949) starring our favorite western hero, the immortal "Creep-A-Long Dodo." This is a great example of topical satire involving the early days of television on the East Coast, which doubtless proved to be a marvelous source of inspiration for comic book creators.

Most people recall The Lone Ranger as the first western hero to ride the television gravy train (beginning in 1949), but silver-haired actor William Boyd and his portrayals of Hopalong Cassidy beat Clayton Moore's version of The Lone Ranger to the punch by a year. In anticipation of the post-war boom in the television market, Boyd purchased the rights to his multitude of Hopalong Cassidy "B" films produced from 1935-48. He then sold edited versions to TV, beginning in 1948. These proved so popular that Boyd, then a youngish-



Splash page from **The Dodo and the Frog** #87 (Nov-Dec 1955), one of the greatest parodies in comic history.

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East of the MISSISSIPPI
DAVE REYNOLDS
PO BOX 8198
RADNOR, PA
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PH.610-275-8817
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looking fellow in his mid-50s with his unique white hat and black costume, produced a batch of new hour-long shows, which first ran from 1949-51 on NBC. The Lone Ranger began half-hour shows in 1949.

That's why Fawcett Comics not only featured Hoppy in his own title, but also began a Bill Boyd western title in 1950 and made him a prominent figure in the anthologies *Six-Gun Heroes* and *Real Western Hero*, in addition to using Hoppy in some issues of *Master Comics* as well. There were times in the 1950-51 period when Hopalong Cassidy/Bill Boyd was on the cover of four comics at the same time—unprecedented exposure for a hero of the Old West.

Thus emerged the western Dodo and the Frog satire—required reading for any Hoppy completist. It just goes to show that funny animals don't exist in a vacuum. At the end of this tale, Creep-A-Long, compete with white hat, tries to catch the fleeing Fenimore as "Rudolph the Rustler," who steals an airplane and takes off. Creep-A-Long radios the frog that airplanes haven't been invented yet, whereupon he crashes and is taken off to jail. Of course, radio had not been invented yet, either, but we shouldn't let that get in the way of our laughter!

The Dodo satires resumed with four mediocre efforts—"The

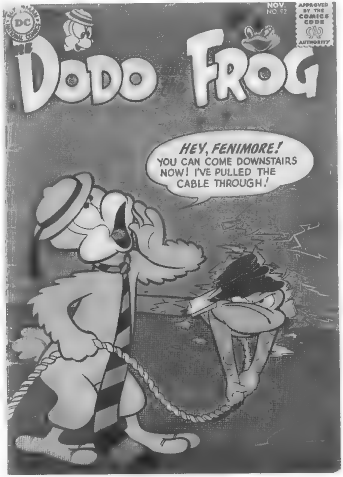
Dodo Boys in Darkest Africa" (#52), "Fenimore's Travels" (#53), "Hansel and Gretel" (#58) and "The Pied Piper of Hamland" (#59).

Dodo and the Frog were back in the finest satirical form, however, in "Samson and Delilah" (#61, Jul-Aug 1951). This issue is a must for collectors of the noted sub-genre, "frogs-in-drag comics." That's right, Fenimore Frog made a most fetching Delilah! Our friend Fenimore was even back in drag two issues later, playing the heroine in "Super Dodo Rides Again" (#63, Nov-Dec 1951)—a great Superman satire. In between, there was "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp" in #62.

The last Dodo and Frog satires were "Space Dodo Rides Again" (talk about mixing your metaphors!) in #74 (Oct-Nov 19530, "Return of Sherlock Dodo" in #78 (May-Jun 1954) and the funniest of all, "Dodo Crockett vs. Chief Fenimore" in #87 (Nov-Dec 1955).

The hysterically funny Dodo Crockett episode in #87, which in my opinion is probably at least as scarce as #92, was the only satire in the 13-issue run under The Dodo and the Frog logo. Davy Crockett was all the rage in the mid-'50s, of course, and this issue is absolutely a must for Crockett completists.

In this eight-page wonderful epic, one of my favorite DC comics stories of the 1950s, Dunbar Dodo as Davy Crockett battles Fenimore Frog as Boney Knee, Chief of the Creep Indians. On the last page, Dodo is about to be burned at the stake and appeals for release on the grounds he must go to The Alamo.



The Dodo and the Frog #92 (Nov 1957), scarce last issue.

"Things are desperate there! The place is surrounded!!" Dodo says, to which Fenimore replies, "So what?!" To which Dodo responds, "It's much more important than a silly quarrel like ours!.... There's a terrific struggle going on! It's bigger than both of us!" Dodo has Fenimore shedding tears—have you ever seen a crying frog complete with feather and blanket?—and begs him: "Are you going to let people say that you were the one who wouldn't let Dodo Crockett go to the Alamo?!" After Fenimore releases Dodo, our lovable bird races off to the Alamo Theater, saying, "Thanks, Chief! I'll see you after the show!"

I don't know, maybe you just have to see this one for yourself. Be advised, though, this is one heck of a rare issue. The only copy of #87 I've ever seen is the one I bought.

Incidentally, on the ad page opposite the last page of this little imbroglio is an advertisement for "The official 4-piece Superman playsuit in long-lasting rayon gabardine, complete with billowing cape...only $6.98." That was big bucks for a Christmas gift in those days! Factoring in inflation, this nearly half-century old costume would go for about $50 today. I wonder how many of these survived. I've never seen one. The interesting angle is that they presented the costumes in both boys' and girls' versions, with the little "Supergirl" wearing two blue hair ribbons to match the costume! These costume ads ran only during the fall of 1955, in anticipation of Christmas, and never appeared again, so apparently these costumes did not sell well.

Over the last 33 issues of *Funny Stuff/Dodo and the Frog* (#60-92), not two consecutive issues ever had the same lineup of characters—the only constants were good old Dunbar and Fenimore. Apparently, the cartoonists did stories to whatever length the tale seemed to mandate, and DC's editors just fit together whatever made up a representative issue.

Baseball was a favorite cover theme—#63, 68, 74, 78 and 85 featured Dodo's diamond doings. Here's a great example of why baseball covers are so much fun to discover and collect, since relatively few of them were portrayed in the *Photo-Journal*. But that's another column.

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by Pat Calhoun

The Radio Connection

Science and Invention (Feb 1921). One of many examples of futuristic beam technology, although the characters seem old-fashioned enough. The artist is Howard Browne who would go on in the 1930s to become a regular cover artist on **Astounding Stories**.

The connection between comic books and radio goes much deeper than shared character series and spooky short stories. It's been amply documented how pulp magazines were a seminal influence on the mass-market comic book industry as it developed in the 1930s, not only in terms of plots, protagonists and packaging, but also as a supplier of creators, editors and publishers. And since science fiction was especially important in both those senses, it's worth reviewing how the father of magazine SF, Hugo Gernback, began his publishing career with a magazine about radio and electronics back in 1908, *Modern Electrics*.

As a boy back in Luxembourg Hugo made money by installing telephones and lights for the locals. He immigrated to the USA in 1904 and opened up a mail-order supply house for electronics equipment. So his first magazine, *Modern Electrics* in 1908, was more a part of his "radio" business, an outgrowth of catalogs, than "pulp publishing." But as time went on Gernsback found the magazine format was a perfect way to promote interest in science, not only writing about the latest inventions but speculating on future ones. This led to a *Modern Electrics* (Aug 1911) cover of New York in the Year 2000. The "Special Wireless Number" of *Modern Electrics* (Feb 1912) featured a pure SF cover of radio between space ships. A blurb refers the reader to the accompanying article inside on page 790—and no! this does not mean the mag was the size of a thick phone book but that Gernback used pagination for each volume rather than each issue. 1912 is also famous in pulp fiction history as the year that Edgar Rice Burroughs premiered both his John Carter of Mars series and Tarzan.

After selling *Modern Electrics* in 1913 Gernsback started the *Electrical Experimenter* and the June 1915 cover is an excellent color painting of a space ship protected by a force field. For along with radio, the whole host of beam and wave wireless technology seemed to offer infinite promise. Electrical pioneer Nicola Tesla theorized that sophisticated electronics could tap into the "free energy" that exists everywhere. In fact such ideas presented a threat to the corporate industrial leaders, and that is why Tesla, despite a long line of inventions including alternating current and fluorescent lights, is less than a household name.

Gernsback popularized many Tesla ideas: along with force fields were death rays, anti-gravity, and electronic medicine. Gernsback also promoted space travel, and *Electrical Experimenter*'s (Sep 1919) cover shows not only a functional space suit but a neat demonstration of gravitational relativity giving a man super strength. Paging Jerry Siegel! This issue is one of the transitional ones to the new title of *Science and Invention*.

Science and Invention (Feb 1921) has the transition almost complete (still billing itself as "formerly *Electrical Experimenter*") and a nice cover of an invisibility ray by Howard Browne. And although the price was now up to twenty-five cents, the page count had increased (to 144) and the oversized "bedsheet" format was retained.

Science and Invention (May 1924)

Electrical Experimenter (Sep 1919). Definitely a Superman prototype, but the concept of super strength on a world with lighter gravity had been explored by Edgar Rice Burroughs back in 1912 when John Carter of Mars made incredible leaps and lifted great weights.

Electrical Experimenter (Jun 1915). This colorful cover may be an early effort by the artist most associated with Gernsback, Frank R. Paul. It clearly shows their interest in Tesla's "force field" concept and how valuable that would be in space.

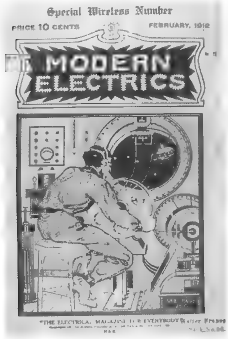
Science and Invention (May 1924) One of the best, pre-**Amazing** covers—red robots with blue buzz-saws against a metallic gold background and menacing an emphatic crowd of panic-stricken people.

has a wonderful SF cover of robot police that look to be terrorizing more than protecting. Those buzz-saw hands don't look much good for helping old ladies cross the street! With less than two years to go before the launch of *Amazing Stories*, Gernback has all the "packaging" elements under control, needing only to shift from scientific articles to fiction, or scientifiction as he called it.

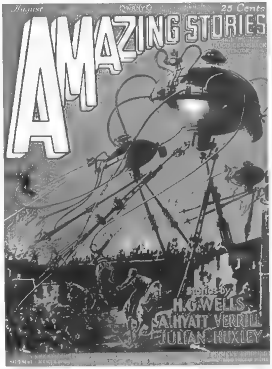
One of Gernsback's greatest visions was of a super-scientific life on Mars, a concept that flowered on the cover of *Science and Invention* (Sep 1924) probably by Howard Browne, but definitely taking its cue from the article inside written and illustrated by the master SF artist Frank R. Paul. This Martian, often pictured as here with his ray-gun and antigrav cities in the background, appears again and again, as part of Paul's "Life on Other Worlds" series that ran on *Amazing* back covers (and *Fantastic Adventures*—this is from the first issue, May 1939) in the late 1930s and early-mid '40s, and on the cover of Gernback's sole comic book effort, the first issue of *Superworld Comics* (Apr 1940), which ran for three issues. And many other STF iconic images from early Gernsback imprinted into the minds of those who would be creating comics a few years later and thus resurfaced during the Golden Age.

Gernsback himself was the man who realized that the airwaves would have to be regulated, and the government read his editorials on the subject, incorporating much of his language into the "Wireless Act of 1912." Hugo also founded radio station WRNY in 1925 that broadcasted a primitive form of television in 1928. He started another STF title, *Wonder Stories*, in 1929 wherein appeared the famous three-part article on space flight, an important translation of the German Hermann Oberth's ideas into English that Gernsback had read in the original language. This was the "Real McCoy" and elucidated the concepts that all the entrants (Germany, USA, Russia, etc) would employ in the coming space race.

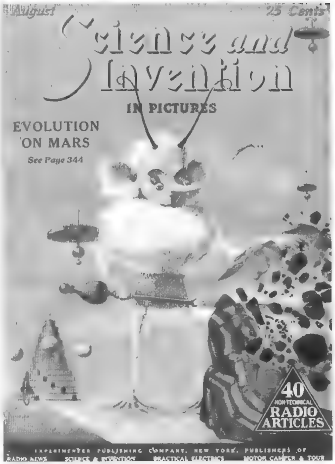
Hugo Gernsback was also a very sharp dresser, a gourmet and a connoisseur of champagnes. He took a last turn with an SF mag, *Science Fiction Plus*, in 1953 which ran seven issues. Not only did Gernsback's career inspire the SF field to name their annual award in his honor, but he was presented with a special Hugo at the 1960 convention for being the "Father of Magazine Science Fiction." Gernsback died in 1967.

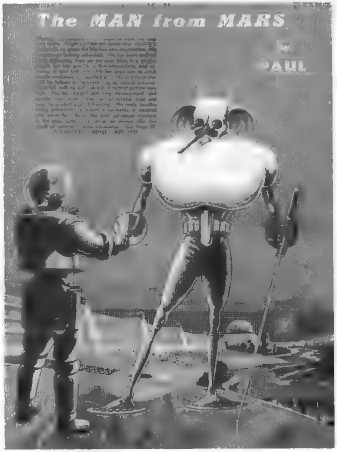


Modern Electrics (Feb 1912). In this "Special Wireless Number" Gernsback combines his two obsessions—radio and space flight. This early science fiction (before the term existed!) focusing on technological advancement would come to be known as "hard" SF.



Amazing Stories (Aug 1927). This Paul cover is a vivid portrayal of H.G. Wells' featured reprint "The War of the Worlds," which was itself, twelve years hence, transformed into a famous radio show presented in a "breaking news" format that sounded like a real invasion and terrified thousands of listeners.



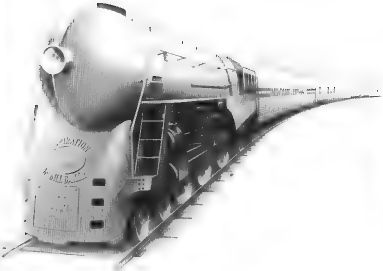


Superworld Comics #1 (Apr 1940). "Paul's" Martian again, and this time again for Gernsback in the first issue (of three) of Hugo's sole comic book title. Despite the great cover, most of the stories and art inside were less than stellar.

Science Fiction Plus (Aug 1953). Forty-two and a half years after "Ralph 124C41+" began serialization in **Modern Electrics** with story by Gernsback and art by Paul, the two old pros were still making mass-market SF together.

(top left) **Science and Invention** (Sep 1924). The Martian is a collaboration between editor Gernsback, inside artist (and article writer!) Paul, and cover artist (probably) Howard Browne.

(bottom left) **Fantastic Adventures** #1 (May 1939). This fabulous back cover with Paul's Martian pegs Frank as the main force behind the concept as **Fantastic Adventures**, debuting in the oversized format, was published by Ziff-Davis with Gernsback no longer editor or publisher.



Interview by Bill Baker

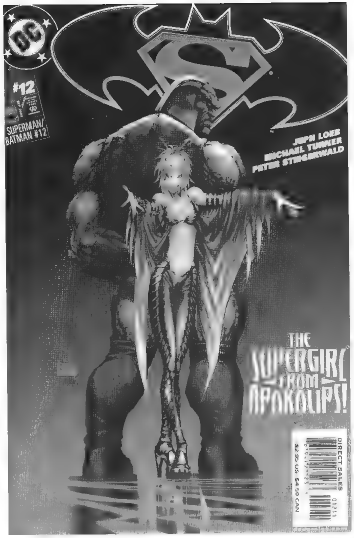
Whether they discovered his work while he was serving as the artist of Top Cow's wildly popular Witchblade *series, or if they first noticed his voluptuous line work when he dove headfirst into the emerald depths of his own fantasies to create* Fathom, *it's undeniable that there's a veritable army of fans out there who love Michael Turner's art work. And while it's true that many of them sought out the artist's books for his sublime portrayals of the female form, there are just as many folks who enjoy Turner's books because of his attention to detail, his ability to capture exciting action sequences, and his wildly inventive layouts.*

And for those keeping tabs on such things, what's also obvious is the man's commitment to improving his already protean abilities, and to exploring the limits of both his imagination and his command of the art form itself. In fact, this inner drive towards improvement and expansion of abilities is probably more evident now in Turner's output than ever before. Not only has he spent the past six months working on an incredibly popular run on DC Comics' Superman/Batman *title with scribe Jeph Loeb, he also spent the past year successfully launching his own imprint, Aspen Comics, which will publish the continuing adventures of characters from his* Fathom *series, as well as new titles developed with both Loeb and Geoff Johns. A grueling schedule, true, but one which only seems to fuel Turner's fire, and only provides further proof that as long as Michael Turner's making comics, surely, he's…*

In His Element

Michael Turner on using influences to fuel new work and ideas

Comic Book Marketplace: I was wondering if there were any particular artists whose work inspires, or has inspired, your own efforts.



Superman/Batman #12 cover.

Michael Turner: Well, I'm sitting here looking at my posters for *Star Wars*, *Return of the Jedi* and *Empire Strikes Back*. Drew Struzan is just *awesome*.

You should have seen me. I met him at San Diego [a few years ago], because he was signing right next to our booth. And I was a fan boy. I was going up to him, "How you doing, sir?" [General laughter] It was crazy. I had like a dozen people watching me do this, and they were like, "Dude, you're weird."

"I know, I know. I'm a big fan of his."

He actually wants to do a *Fathom* cover, so I'm going to talk to him about that. He's a friend of friends, and he was showing me these different techniques, and I was just like oohing and ahhing! [General laughter]

CBM: He's certainly someone that it'd be worth learning a few things from.

Turner: Yeah. It's a very different style of drawing. He does things from photos, *very* well. But his techniques are just great, and his composition is really good, and his montage stuff is unmatched. So he's somebody that I aspire to.

Superman Batman #13 cover

Ekos Preview cover.

Ekos Pittsburgh Comic Convention Preview cover.

CBM: Are there any other artists whose work, like Drew's, gets you really excited, or moves you?

Turner: There's a Chinese artist. I don't have his name on the tip of my tongue, but he's just awesome. He's done a handful of stuff, and some painted work. There are a couple of Japanese guys that I look at, just to juice me. Just like really cool painted stuff. You know, I don't draw anything like anime, and I don't even want to. But these guys kind of do that, and they do it *so* well, and show emotion so well, and do different things just brilliantly. So those are people I kind of look at.

I don't *really* look at comic books for stuff. I kind of want to do my own thing. I feel that if I look at stuff, sometimes I'll feel like I'm swiping something. There are a lot of cool guys out there that I look at. I love Marc's stuff when it comes out, and Joe Madureira, *when* it comes out, and Jeff Scott Campbell, too. And those guys are all buddies, which is great.

CBM: And, for the most part, very dissimilar styles from yours, too.

Turner: Yeah. As I said, I don't look at people that draw like me, so I can draw stuff. I look at stuff that's just going to juice me, creatively, have me going, "Oh, that was *cool*, I like the way he thought of that!" And then it'll make me go, "OK, now I gotta come up with this thing, and then ..." [Laughter]

For more on Michael Turner's new imprint, go to ***http://www.AspenComics.com.***

by Chris Boyko

Calling All Adventure Fans!..... Calling All Dick Tracy Fans!..... .....Stand By!.....Dick Tracy is ON THE AIR!

True, Dick Tracy is not actually *on* the radio right now, but at almost any time between 1935 and 1948 excitable young boys and girls could get their fill of America's Most Famous Detective in either daily 15 minute episodes or as a weekly 30 minute complete story on Saturday nights. Not coincidentally, the period of Tracy's radio wave dominance matches up with what most Tracy fans consider the prime years of the comic strip, when Chester Gould's writing and art were at their zenith. And the best part about the radio drama? All the stories were new, not adaptations of comic strip storylines, and the writing, especially on the 1930s daily installments, was sharp and fast paced, rivaling the best of Gould's efforts.

Dick Tracy first appeared on the air in late 1935 as a serial format on Mutual Radio, but it was a bit slow paced and with a fairly low budget; despite this it was quite popular. The program really didn't hit its stride until the 1937-39 period when it ran on NBC for 15 minutes every weekday. This was the best period of the radio drama (not only for Dick Tracy), but the Tracy shows especially benefited from the tight, action-packed scripts supplied by Richard Lowther and tense and terse dialogue delivered by Ned Weaver as Tracy. During this three year period, Tracy ran afoul of several nefarious plots, the most famous perhaps being "The Case of the Black Pearl of Osiris" which ran for nearly three weeks in February of 1938. The plot of this complex tale, centering on the crooked

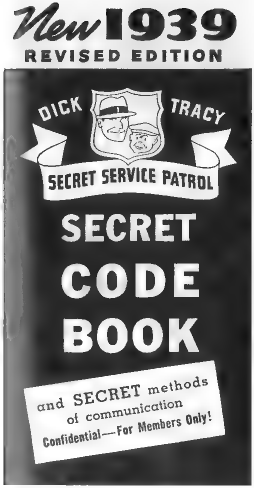
A Canadian blotter advertising the late 1940s version of the daily serial radio show with classic graphics by Chester Gould (from the Bruce Kaufman collection).

archeologist Dryden Small, his theft of the Black Pearl, and the efforts of Humi Batik, High Priest of Osiris, to get it back, is quite engrossing and took 14 episodes to tell (that's three and a half hours!). But the reason this story remains so well known today probably has less to do with the plot and more to do with the puffed wheat.

Yes, I said puffed wheat. The sponsor of the series at this time was Quaker Puffed Wheat and Puffed Rice ("Cereals that are shot from guns! Eight times their normal size! Especially easy to digest!"). They had wonderful success with the Dick Tracy Secret Service Patrol promotion that offered boys and girls the chance to send in cereal box tops in exchange for a Patrol Certificate and various badges. The trick was that you had to pass up the chain of command from Sergeant to Inspector General without skipping any steps and each step required you to send in MORE box tops! I calculate that, by the time you attained the exalted top rank of Inspector General, you would have had to send in 42 box tops to Quaker (44 if you also wanted to be a Patrol Leader). Obviously, that meant a lot of product moving off the shelves! Based on how many Inspector General badges are floating around the collectible market, I would say that a lot of kids didn't make it that far. If you were a member of the Secret Service Patrol you would also be given the secret code book that allowed you to answer the daily secret messages given by Dick or Junior Tracy on the radio program; a real breakthrough in listener participation. But Quaker had another ace promotion up their sleeves that they sprung upon the salivating kiddies on Friday, February 18, 1938: the Dick Tracy Secret Compartment Ring. It was modified from the ring given to Tracy by Humi Batik to hide the Black Pearl in, and featured cabalistic symbols and a portrait of Dick Tracy. Additionally, and ever-mindful that the audience included girls as well, Quaker offered up a bangle bracelet also, only five box tops each! The ring was a smash promotion and one of the most in-demand radio premium rings around today, along with such classics as the Shadow's Blue Coal Ring and Captain Midnight's Secret Compartment Ring. Several other Quaker premium items from the NBC radio show included two

1938 advertisement showing the wide array of premium products available from Dick Tracy and Quaker products. The aviation theme is a bit of a mystery as Dick Tracy was never much of a flyer. Perhaps Quaker was trying to cash in on his aerial antics in the first Dick Tracy serial from Republic, which was released in 1937.

The essential Quaker Dick Tracy Secret Service Patrol Certificate from 1938-39. Edgar Charles Huselline, where are you now?



The 1939 Secret Service Patrol Secret Code Book with all you need to decode the secret radio messages from Dick and Junior!

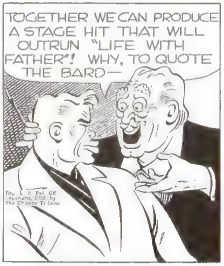
Whitman Big Little Book-type radio play booklets (*Dick Tracy and the Invisible Man* and *Dick Tracy's Ghost Ship*), a whole slew of aviation gear (although Dick was never known as much of a flyer), and the very popular Secret Service Phones (slightly better than tin cans with strings). The *Ghost Ship* script actually went through three iterations, first as a radio script, second as a premium, and lastly as a bona fide Big Little Book entitled *Dick Tracy and the Phantom Ship* which was also printed in Spanish as *Dick Tracy y el Bogue Fantasma* in 1940.

In spite of its success, and perhaps because of World War II, the program went on hiatus from 1940-42 but returned in serial format on the Blue Network (later to become ABC) from 1943-48. From 1946-48 there was also a self-contained half-hour program on Saturday nights which had a much different tone from the old NBC serials as well as a new sponsor: Tootsie Rolls. The "Toot Toot Tootsie" thematic jingle set the stage for what was a more farcical version of Tracy's adventures. Not outright comedy but somewhat overburdened with comic relief in the form of such characters as Vitamin Flintheart, his wife Snowflake Falls (who sounded like Katherine Hepburn on the verge of a nervous breakdown), and Gravel Gertie. Flintheart, who was played with panache by Johnny Griggs, was an overpowering character on the radio (as was his movie counterpart played by Ian Keith in 1946's *Dick Tracy vs. Cueball* and 1947's *Dick Tracy's Dilemma*, both based on the original strip character introduced by Gould in 1944 during the classic Flattop Jones storyline). In fact, Flintheart was so overpowering in all media that one cannot help but wonder why Gould did not "retire" him earlier and put the spotlight more firmly on Tracy (after his 1950 comic strip run-in with Flattop's brother Blowtop, Flintheart did not show up until 1978, after Gould retired!). The ABC shows had their own premiums, including the Dick Tracy Junior Detective Kit, which are quite collectible and hard to find in complete and unused condition, but, alas, no rings! The daily serial version in the late 1940s seems to have had several sponsors, such as Tip-

The Dick Tracy Junior Detective Kit, a Tootsie Roll premium from 1944; finding an intact one is tough!

Johnny Griggs as Vitamin Flintheart and announcer from the late 1940s Saturday night version of the radio show. Who knew radio was so visual? (from the Bruce Kaufman Collection.)

Vitamin Flintheart gets in Blowtop's face (May 23, 1950).



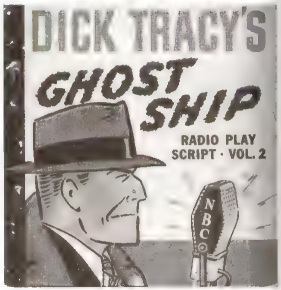
Top Bread, and some of its own premiums like paper pop guns. The serial version of the late 1940s had more in common with the Quaker serials of the late 1930s in that the stories were played straight and lacked the comic elements so prevalent in the Saturday evening versions. However, funny or straight, both versions of the Dick Tracy radio show took their last bows in 1948 as the radio dramas began to fade against the glare of televisions' bright lights. Today, Both of the radio play script booklets, **Dick Tracy and the Invisible Man** and **Dick Tracy's Ghost Ship**, produced by Whitman in 1939, and available as Quaker premiums to listeners.

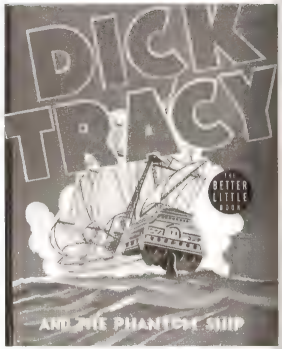
Dick Tracy and the Phantom Ship (Whitman 1939 Big Little Book) based on the radio script by way of the 1939 Quaker premium booklet **Dick Tracy's Ghost Ship**.

at least 69 episodes from all eras of the Dick Tracy radio show are known to exist and, thanks to the Internet, can be purchased at nominal prices in CD format. They make a wonderful, action packed listening experience for all interested in radio drama!

In closing, it is fitting to mention that perhaps the most surreal moment in the history of *any* radio show occurred on May 1, 1945, when announcer George Gunn stated that "Adolph Hitler died of a stroke at the Reich Chancellery in the heart of burning Berlin" and added that German Radio indicated he had died "fighting up to his last breath against Bolshevism." This news was delivered by the same announcer who, moments earlier, had just introduced "Yes, it's Dick Tracy, protector of law and order" and after the momentous announcement, without a pause, shouted out "And now, Dick Tracy"! Tracy had spent the duration of the war fighting against Nazi spies and saboteurs in the comic pages (such as Karpse, The Brow, and Pruneface) and on the radio as well. How fitting that the news of the death of America's most hated foe was announced during a show about its most famous detective!

Chris Boyko has been collecting comic art, ECs, Silver Age Marvels, and Dick Tracy memorabilia since 1975 and is running out of room. He has attended numerous auctions, buys and sells on eBay on a regular basis, and has appeared on PBS' Find! *as a comic art specialist. He also edited the second edition of* The Comic Art Price Guide *and* 100 Greatest Comic Books, *both written by Jerry Weist.*





Tip-Top Bread paper gun premium from late 1940s, a nice unbroken example (from the Bruce Kaufman Collection).

Dick Tracy Secret Service Phones from 1939. Yes, they actually work (but no call waiting)!

The stylish Secret Compartment Ring from 1938, introduced in the "Case of the Black Pearl of Osiris."

The Patrol Leader bar, available to members of the Secret Service Patrol who recruited more members. Scarce and desirable, if boring (from the Bruce Kaufman Collection).

The coveted Secret Service Patrol Inspector General Badge from 1938, now worth around $1000 in pristine condition (from the Bruce Kaufman Collection).

MYSTERY of the GREEN HORNET

by Will Murray

It was sometime around 1962 or '63 that I first heard the buzz of the Green Hornet. I was around ten—too young to have experienced Al Hodge or Donovan Faust playing the role during the heyday of the original radio show, which started in 1936 as *The Adventures of the Hornet* and ran continuously until around the time I was born, in 1953.

I don't have any clear recollections of what mental images that early belated exposure to old-time radio drama conjured up in my imagination. I never saw a clear picture in my mind. Along with The Shadow, another vintage thriller being aired over Boston's WORL at the time via the Van Christo Radio Theatre, the Hornet was a nebulous creature of my childhood. But a memorable one. The Van Christo people advertised the Green Hornet with a mysterioso picture of the Black Beauty, drawn as a period automobile with a brace of supercharger coils sprouting from its long sinister hood. But I never knew what the Hornet was supposed to look like.

So when ABC-TV began airing *The Green Hornet* in the Fall of 1966, I was thrilled and completely accepting of their domino-masked version of the famous crime-crusher. Publicity caused old pictures of the radio and movie serial Hornet to surface and I was intrigued and puzzled by his strange black celluloid shield of a mask, which covered the lower portion of his face yet left his eyes exposed.

I think the show had gone off the air when I first made the electrifying discovery that the Green Hornet was descended from another old radio great, The Lone Ranger.

Like others of my generation, I came by this arcane knowledge through Jim Harmon's 1967 book, *The Great Radio Heroes*.

Harmon detailed the story of how, after about ten years of the two shows emanating from Detroit's station WXYZ without any more hint of this secret connection than both heroes shared the surname Reid, the truth was finally revealed.

Daily Sentinel newspaper publisher Britt Reid sits down with his father, grizzled old Dan Reid, for a heart-to-heart talk.

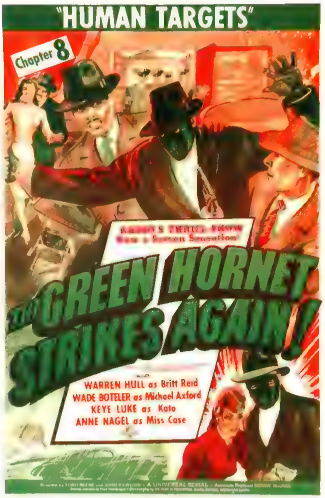
Here is how Harmon recounted the scene:

"I know personally that the Green Hornet is no criminal," insists Britt Reid. "In his own way, he fights for law and order. Can you believe that?"

"I think I can believe a lot more than that," replied Dan Reid. "I think I know what you are trying to tell me."

The young publisher met the eye of the man who had built the *Daily Sentinel* into one of America's greatest newspapers. "Dad, I am the Green Hornet."

"I suspected as much,"



In the serials *The Green Hornet* and *The Green Hornet Strikes Again*, both of which Universal released in 1939 and 40, the Hornet's mask is redesigned as a celluloid shield concealing the upper part of Britt Reid's face.

the elder Reid said.

"How could you? The world thinks I'm nothing but an idle playboy, dabbling in the newspaper business."

"Son, you've seen the painting on this wall many times. I gave it to you years ago."

"Why yes, Dad—the picture of the Masked Man on the great white horse."

"Everyone knows who he was—he is a part of American history. But the world does not know that the Masked Man is your ancestor, Britt—my uncle, your great-uncle."

"Then I'm—I'm carrying on in his tradition, bringing to justice those he would fight if he were here today."

"Yes, Britt. He would be as proud of you as I am."

"Faintly," recalled Harmon," *The William Tell Overture* played through this scene on *The Green Hornet.* At the time, the struck me as having tremendous significance, a sense of purpose and continuation, world without end."

As it turns out, Harmon was quoting from memory. For the three-part story in which the truth comes out recently surfaced on the old-time radio collector's market. It opened with "Exposed," first broadcast on October 28, 1947.

At that point, The Green Hornet had been going strong for almost 12 years, the Lone Ranger nearly 15. It all began at the studios of Detroit's WXYZ, when owner George Trendle handed Lone Ranger creator and chief script writer Fran Striker a copy of Frank L. Packard's *The Adventures of Jimmie Dale,* a seminal crime novel featuring a wealthy young clubman who fights crime as the Grey Seal.

George Trendle told Fran Striker, "Read this. We can do something like this with our new series. The Lone Ranger appeals to kids. Now I want something on the air to interest young people who are about to vote. I want to do something to show young men that they have to get out and vote and see what's going on in the world, watch things so we can elect candidates that will be something."

"Kind of expose crime—and set things right—like the Lone Ranger," returned Striker.

"But modern. Work something out and let me see it."

Several scripts were prepared until Trendle was satisfied.

WXYZ Sales Manager H. Allen Campbell is said to have come up with the character's original name. "You tell me this fellow goes out and stings the crooked politicians and gangsters. Why don't you call him the Bee or the Hornet?"

"Not enough action in a bee," Trendle mused. "Hornet might be all right. I like that. The Hornet."

The first two episodes ran as *The Adventures of the Hornet* in January 1936. It was soon discovered that it was not possible to copyright a simple, unadorned name like The Hornet.

"Well, could we call him some kind of Hornet and be different?" Campbell asked. He began suggesting variations. "The Buzzing Hornet. Green Hornet. Red Hornet. Hornet with a sting—"

"Green Hornet. The Green Hornet," Trendle said slowly. "That's not bad. *The Green Hornet.*"

The way Fran Striker wrote it in the first script, Britt Reid is already operating in a super-silent black car. Then his Japanese valet Cato—later spelled Kato—installs a buzzing horn.

"It sounds like the buzzing of the giant insect threatening to sting," Britt muses.

"Maybe changes in design might make your mask more like buzzing insect," Cato adds.

"That's it, Cato! An insect! The Hornet! That's the insect!"

"Name Hornet sound good."

Britt Reid (played by Al Hodge) and Kato (played by Raymond Hayashi) check the teletype for where the action is from the Universal serial *The Green Hornet.*

Fran Striker retold the Hornet's origin in his 1940 Big Little Book, *The Green Hornet Strikes*.

"The *Sentinel* can spread the name 'The Hornet' far and wide! It will be a name to strike terror into the hearts of lawbreakers. It will be on everyone's lips!"

"Sting of hornet is very painful," agrees Cato. "Make large bump."

Fran Striker retold the Hornet's origin in his 1940 Big Little Book, *The Green Hornet Strikes*. After recounting how Britt Reid had saved Kato's life during a trip to the Orient, subsequently taking him back to the US as his valet, Striker explained that Kato was a mechanical genius who had begun construction of a super-car under Britt's supervision:

"No one had been told about the sleek black machine. Only Britt and Kato knew of its existence. They used that car to go out in the night and get proof for police officials against a certain gang of hoodlums. While the hoodlums went to jail, the mysterious figure in the phantom car had been blamed for a killing that had taken place.

"That was how Britt Reid became hunted by the law. He knew, then, that if ever he were captured, and identified as the one who had driven the super-car, there might be a death penalty to pay.

"But this hadn't interfered with Britt's intention to repeat his service to the city. He fashioned a mask out of green cloth, and struck again in similar fashion. The horn of the car, sounding somewhat like the buzzing of a giant wasp, was the inspiration of a newspaper reporter. He became known as the mysterious 'Hornet.'

"Later, when the color of his mask was described, the mysterious figure was called the 'Green Hornet.' Time after time the Green Hornet struck at lawbreakers who could not be reached by police officials because of the red tape of the law."

The mystery car would not be dubbed the Black Beauty until 1940 or so. Kato came up with the name, which was inspired by the fact that the vehicle was built and stored in an old livery stable adjacent to Reid's apartment house.

Although the Green Hornet was often depicted in comics as wearing a green fedora and overcoat, his black half-mask emblazoned with the sign of the Hornet in green, Striker originally described the mask as green with the Hornet symbol outlined in white. Later he changed it to the more appropriate green hornet against black. A black topcoat and gloves, set off by a gray hat completes the outfit.

This is the image seen in the serials *The Green Hornet* and *The Green Hornet Strikes Again*, both of which Universal released in 1939 and 40, except that the mask is redesigned as a celluloid shield concealing the upper part of Reid's face as well.

The Green Hornet clearly enjoyed his highest success and popularity between 1936-46. After the war, the public appetite for masked crime busters waned significantly. Thus, everyone involved began looking for ways to retool the show. Which brings us back to the 1947 Green Hornet trilogy where buried secrets are brought to light.

Britt Reid hires a new reporter named Linda Travis, unaware that she is a plant—a private detective hired by his father to ferret out why the younger Reid isn't living up to his expectations. Old Dan Reid, unaware of the Green Hornet's true identity, thinks his son should be more of a crusader than he has become.

Simultaneously, the Hornet gets on the trail of a counterfeiter who has been faking the kind of stickers The Green Hornet usually leaves at the scene of his "crimes."

Linda Travis finds herself caught up in a crossfire and hides in the Black Beauty's rear seat. The battle over, The Hornet and Kato drive home. When Linda is discovered, it's too late. She now knows that Britt Reid is The Green Hornet.

In "Graft Crosses the Bridge" (11/04/47), Reid learns from Linda Travis that she was hired by his father and must report her discovery to Dan Reid. Britt asks for a little time. He knows it's the end of the Green Hornet, if not of Britt Reid's publishing career. Linda acquiesces. She now understands

The Green Hornet (played by Al Hodge) catches a bad guy. The radio show originated on WXYZ in Detroit, the show ran from 1936-1952.

On these three pages, The Green Hornet's true identity is revealed to Linda Travis, Dan Reid and Commissioner Higgins from *Green Hornet Fights Crime* #43 (Harvey, January 1949). This version was loosely based on the original radio broadcast.

that the Hornet is not an outlaw, but a secret crime fighter.

In "Too Hot to Handle" (11/11/47), old Dan Reid arrives from out West. Linda Travis drives him to Britt's apartment, and the showdown begins.

The scene opens with Old Dan Reid losing patience with his son:

"I want you to quit stalling, Britt. You've made all the proper inquiries about my health, and my trip from the west. You've offered cigarettes, cigars and highballs. But confound it, there's just one thing I want: Now you and Miss Travis have something to tell me. Now what is it?"

"Dad, I—I don't know just where to begin. You—you've heard of the Green Hornet, haven't you?"

"Heard of him! I was the one that suggested the *Sentinel* post a reward for his capture. And I can't understand why you haven't been able to get him."

"Well, you wanted it quick and straight. So...here it is. I am the Green Hornet."

Organ sting.

"So, you created the character of the Green Hornet. Why did you do it, son? Haven't you always had everything you wanted?"

"I sure have, Dad. Things have been handed to me on a silver platter from the time I was a kid. When it was time for me to go to work, you gave me the *Daily Sentinel* and a competent staff to run it."

"I'd hoped that the responsibility of managing a newspaper would be good for you."

"I think it was. I learned about things that I never knew existed."

"Uh?"

"I saw political grafters and confidence men bend the law nearly double without actually breaking it. I had inside information on political bribes. I knew of crooks in our government, and there wasn't a thing that could be done about them. We couldn't even publish their activities because the law couldn't get proof that would hold up in court. A lot of criminals went free because of tricky laws, and red tape."

"But the Green Hornet—everyone thinks the Hornet is a criminal!"

"Dad, I could see only one way to get those rats. Someone had to meet them and play the game their way, with no holds barred. Putting them in jail was the most important thing to me. It came ahead of the newspaper. Ahead of my reputation. Ahead of everything. If you'll look at the records, you'll see that I was successful. Maybe I was wrong..."

"No, no," Linda interrupts. "You were not wrong."

"Now that the secret is out," Dan Reid asks, "what are you

going to do?"

"The secret is not out," Britt counters. "Unless you let it out. Kato has shared the secret with me. Linda will share it. It…could be shared with you."

"Ahhh." Linda Travis jumps in. "Mr. Reid, regardless of what the public thinks, there isn't a single charge against the Green Hornet. The police haven't a thing on him."

"There were charges! The *Sentinel* has been offering a reward."

"Yes, but the record is clean now. The last murder charge was wiped off the books a few days ago."

"And Linda, you'd forego the reward to keep this secret?"

"Oh, I—I don't want that kind of money."

"Well, you can't buy loyalty like that."

"Oh, there's such a need for someone like the Green Hornet."

"It's up to you, Dad. Are you…with me?"

Another organ sting reverberates.

After a pause, Dan Reid chuckles. It swells into a hearty laugh.

"Dad. You're not angry?"

"Angry? Why, how could I be angry with you? I know exactly how you feel because…I went through the same thing."

"You?"

"Look at that picture on the wall. The man on that horse is one of your ancestors. And those hills are in Texas. When I was a boy, I—I rode with that man."

Cue *The William Tell Overture*, not faintly, but strongly, swelling up over Dan Reid's speech.

"I saw him six-gun his way through red tape and ride roughshod over crooks who thought they were too smart for the law. He rode for justice."

The *Overture* fades…

"Britt, I gave you the *Daily Sentinel* because I knew you'd learn a lot about smart crooks that the law couldn't get. I hoped you'd do something about those crooks, just like your pioneer ancestor did. I wanted to see you use the paper as a crusading weapon. I wanted to see sparks fly. But, nothing came."

"But, Dad—"

"I was disappointed, son. I wondered what was the matter with you. Wondered why the American heritage didn't assert itself. That's why I sent Linda here. I sent her to find out what was wrong with you. And now I learn…. Why, confound it, Britt, you're more like the man in that picture than I dreamed you could be. This is the biggest thing that—that's ever happened to me. This is—"

Old Dan Reid chokes up.

"Dad—"

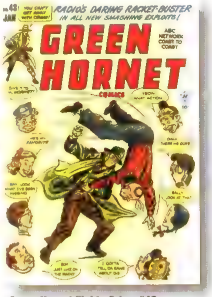
"You and Linda will have to forgive an old man his emotions."

Britt whispers, "Dad, you're tops."

"Old Man? What am I saying? I feel younger than I have in twenty years. More than that. I'm with ya, boy. I'm with ya all the way. If I can help the Green Hornet stamp out crooks, it will be just like it was back in those Texas hills when I helped the man in that picture."

From this point on, the now-cleared Hornet starts working hand in glove with Police Commissioner Higgins. And Dan Reid, the son of one of the Texas Rangers slain at Bryant's Gap, and nephew of the lone surviving Ranger whose first name was never revealed (could it have been Britt?) remains satisfied that he raised his son right.

The 1947-48 season of *The Green Hornet* found Britt's loyal secretary, Miss Case, and Linda Travis vying for the affections of their boss. Lenore Case discovered Britt's



Green Hornet Fights Crime #43 (Harvey, January 1949).

identity in "Miss Case Keeps a Secret" (10/17/48). Commissioner Higgins was also admitted to the growing inner circle on radio, as he was in comics.

Ultimately, Linda Travis was tragically killed in a 1948 car accident, taking the truth with her. It was a sad ending for the first person to unmask The Green Hornet...and unquestionably the most important.

It's fascinating how the two radio series converged. Yet it may not have been planned from the beginning. When Fran Striker created the Lone Ranger late in 1932, he followed the model of Johnston McCulley's Zorro. Over the years, Striker's laughing devil-may-care Lone Ranger matured into the somber and righteous character we now know, assisted by the Indian brave, Tonto. The Lone

Ranger's official origin was not revealed until the 1939 Republic serial, *The Lone Ranger,* and not on radio until the 1941 story sequence, "League of the Black Arrow." Even then, the Ranger's family name was not revealed until the introduction of young Dan Reid around Christmas, 1942, after *The Green Hornet* had been running for nearly seven years. It appears that Striker was inspired by The Green Hornet in solidifying The Lone Ranger, and not the other way around, as commonly assumed.

A Green Hornet comic book was first issued in 1940 by Helnit. It soon began issuing from Harvey's offices and was one of their earliest hits in the days before *Casper the Friendly Ghost* and *Richie Rich.* DC Comics editor Murray Boltinoff began his career scripting the series for Bert Whitman's art shop. Artists like Irv Novick, Irwin Hasen, and Jerry Robinson also drew the feature.

Beginning with its first issue, radio episodes of *The Green Hornet* were routinely adapted for Harvey's *Green Hornet Comics.* Over the years, the title became *Green Hornet Fights Crime*, changing to *Green Hornet Racket Buster* in 1949.

But just before that final change, it mysteriously reverted to *Green Hornet Comics* for one issue. This was issue #43, January 1949. It was a very special issue, for it loosely adapted the revelation trilogy in two parts, "Desperate Gamble" and "Flirt with Death."

It starts with roughly the same springboard. The Green Hornet nails a counterfeiter named Beak Phalan who has kidnapped the D.A. Phalan confesses he's been leaving counterfeit Green Hornet stickers at the scenes of his crimes, going back to the day years ago when he killed Frankie Striker, the first murder laid at the Hornet's doorstep.

As on radio, Linda Travis is found hiding in the Black Beauty.

"Miss Travis!" a startled Reid exclaims.

"And you…The Green Hornet! You're Britt Reid! I-I suppose you'll kill me now!"

But Kato assures her that the Hornet is no murderer.

The denouement plays differently in the comic book version. For one thing, it's an action sequence more appropriate to comics. The middle episode is skipped entirely.

After Dan Reid arrives in town to hear Linda's report, both are kidnapped, along with Commissioner Higgins, as bargaining chips to spring Larry Larson, the dope king.

The Hornet busts Larson out of prison and tricks him into taking him to the farmhouse where his friends are being held. Turning the tables, he, Kato, Linda, Dan Reid and Police Commissioner Higgins are all cornered by the criminals.

During the melee, Linda prevents Larson from braining the Hornet with an andiron. When the Hornet says, "Good girl, Linda!", Commissioner Higgins becomes suspicious. The Hornet admits that she's uncovered his true identity. He

***Green Hornet* #1 (Helnit, December 1940).**

plans to gas them into unconsciousness and escape.

"After I've left she'll tell you who I am…and you can decide whether or not to tell Commissioner Higgins," he says.

But it never comes to that. Feisty old Dan Reid rips off the Hornet's mask. The truth is finally out.

While all this is sinking in, Commissioner Higgins resolves the entire dilemma in one compact speech balloon:

"A close inspection of our books show that while the Hornet may have APPEARED to fight WITH crime—in reality he has fought AGAINST it! I think we've been all wrong about the Hornet."

"And you, dad?" says Britt.

"Son, when I was a youngster out west I rode with the vigilantes! They were tough, honest, fearless men…I'm proud of you now as I was of them then!"

The issue ends with the quartet walking off arm in arm. The Green Hornet is embarking on his new crime fighting career—within the law.

Al Avison drew the issue, one of the last to feature two Green Hornet tales. By the end of the year, the comic book faded away. The radio incarnation lasted until 1952. Jack McCarthy was the final radio Green Hornet. It was his voice that was heard in 1947 when Britt and Dan Reid had their famous conversation that tied two of the most famous fictional crime fighters of the 20th Century to the same heroic family.

TOP SECRET

GIBSON, WALTER

WALTER GIBSON'S SECRET COMICS CAREER

by Will Murray

Walter B. Gibson will be forever remembered as the creator and author of The Shadow. As if that weren't enough for one writing career, Gibson also worked prolifically in other media, including radio, comic strips and comic books.

Gibson literally fell into his chief claim to fame. He simply walked into Street & Smith one day in 1930 to try to peddle a few articles to *Detective Story Magazine* when editor Frank E. Blackwell asked him if he wouldn't mind writing a novel for a throwaway pulp magazine S&S needed to rush into print to protect the copyright on the nebulous narrator of their *Detective Story Hour* tie-in radio show. Known for his typewriter speed, Gibson was instructed to turn the spooky voice into a detective character as fast as he could. He produced *The Living Shadow* in a month. That first novel led to over 300 sequels, most by Gibson.

In addition to being talented, Gibson was a very lucky guy. He kept stumbling into interesting and lucrative vocations. Before his death in 1986, he liked to tell the story of how he tried to kick-start Street & Smith into publishing comic books. "I talked to Street & Smith about doing comics, and Bill de Grouchy said, 'The trouble is the syndicate comics are all being used up. You can't get them anymore.' I said: 'That means getting up your own.' He said: 'That's a lot of expense. The way to do these comics is to buy old ones from syndicates.' I said: 'Why not get up some and sell them to syndicates, start comics, get paid by the syndicates and get the rights to use them in comic books?' And I said we should begin with The Shadow."

This was in 1937. Before Superman. Before Batman. How differently comic books might have evolved had The Shadow beat Superman into four color print staggers the imagination. One of S&S's problems was they printed their pulps in-house, and their massive Hoe presses couldn't handle four-color matter.

Even though the superhero comics industry got launched just fine without Walter, he managed to catch hold of its coattails and go along for the ride.

Gibson's comics career was as breathtaking in its sheer prolific sweep as it was in its astonishing anonymity. He did a little bit of everything—and a ton of certain genres—for just about everyone. He scripted *Batman* for Mort Weisinger. *Crime and Punishment* for Charles Biro. Magic comics for four different publishers. Even the lower rent publishers like St. John and Ajax-Farrell made use of his skills. After launching *Racket Squad in Action* for Charlton, he bailed out of their *The Thing* one issue before Steve Ditko climbed on board, thus averting one of the great potential comics collaborations of all time. Walter Gibson was the chief writer for numerous long-running comics titles for several houses, but hardly anyone ever knew it. And he scripted a ton of commercial comics.

Of course, Gibson was most prolific for Street & Smith. When S&S promotion manager William J. de Grouchey launched their first comic entry in 1940, *Shadow Comics*, Gibson was left out in the cold. Jack Binder and the

***Shadow Comics* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Street & Smith, 1940).**

Chesler Shop threw the book together. Since technically he created The Shadow for the pulps, Gibson naturally complained. So S&S offered him double page rate to script his own creation. Anyone else would have held out for a royalty. But Gibson liked to write. So he took the deal, scripting three Shadow stories every month for some six years, as well as adaptations of his Norgil the Magician pulp character, under the house name of Maxwell Grant.

***Shadow Comics* Vol. 1, No. 3 (Street & Smith, May 1940).**

"De Grouchey didn't know how to get hold of artists," he explained, "so he looked for someone to do it, and ran into that guy Chiseler. His real name was Chesler, but we called him Chiseler. He was a character."

Harry "A" Chesler was one of the early comic "shop" proprietors then turning out finished comics for the fledgling industry.

"Jack Binder was his right-hand man," Gibson recalled. "So they gave Binder the first Shadow comic. They may have taken one of the radio plots. They just wanted to see what he could do with it. When I came in, they had that made up. So I said, 'Go ahead and run it.' That was the first issue. From then on, I took over and tied them in with the pulp magazine. So de Grouchey broke off with Chesler and went with Binder."

Gibson started off adapting his own novels, and then branched out into fresh stories featuring weird new villains like Devil Kyoti, Monstradamus, the Talon, the Hag and Solarus, the Space Master.

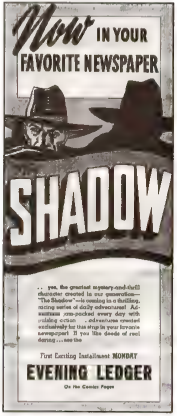
During this hectic period, Gibson also scripted *The Shadow* newspaper strip with artist Vernon V. Greene. All while continuing to write Shadow novels. It started when Greene drew an adaptation of Gibson's Shadow novel, *The Salamanders* for issue #6. Gibson and Greene started talking about The Shadow's possibilities as a regular comic strip. So Gibson scripted a spec story, Greene drew a week's worth of sample continuity, and together they sold it to the Ledger Syndicate, then cut a deal with Street & Smith to reprint the strip in *Shadow Comics*. The strip debuted in June 1940, not long after the comic book hit the stands.

"*The Shadow* comic strip was actually my comic," Gibson explained. "I was the agent. I sold it, and I said they will also give us the rights to use it in any way. And so the same comic stories could be taken later and used in the Street & Smith comic books by breaking them into episodes."

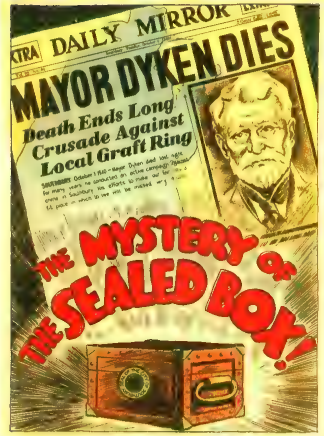
It was Gibson's 1937 brainstorm come to fruition. That sort of cross-pollenization was inevitable, if not unavoidable. The first newspaper strip adaptation of a Shadow novel, *The Sealed Box*, was cut up and repasted for the March 1941 issue of *Shadow Comics*, producing at 33 pages one of the longest comic book stories ever to see four-color print up to that time. Others were also salted in among the new stories.

Gibson took to comics scripting like a bat to darkness. He had been a lifelong fan of the medium.

"Comics were just beginning when I was very young," he once said. "The comics which we used to see in newspapers like the *Philadelphia Press* and *North American* consisted of such things as *Hairbreadth Harry*, *The Airship Man*, *Foxy Grandpa*, *The Yellow Kid*,



Advertisement for *The Shadow* syndicated comic strip.



Splash page for Gibson's story "The Mystery of The Sealed Box!" from *Shadow Comics* #6 (Street & Smith, Aug 1940).

Happy Hooligan, *Lulu* and *Leander* and the original *Katzenjammer Kids*. I was brought up on all of those. There was one that we liked more than any of the rest. I think it's forgotten now. And that was called *Slim Jim*. Well, Slim Jim was a funny-looking character who looked like a tramp. He was always getting in trouble with the Grassville Police Force."

Gibson recalled as a child at the turn of the century playing a hide-and-seek game inspired by Slim Jim.

"I think we thought in pictures way back then," he continued. "I always felt I wouldn't have remembered all those comics so well if they hadn't had a lot of effect on me. So when The Shadow came into the comic field, I was naturally right ready to transcribe it into that form."

One amusing incident occurred when Gibson adapted another one of his Shadow syndicated strips for *Shadow Comics*. It featured a recurring character named Valda Rune who dons a black cat costume while aiding The Shadow. After the comic book version appeared, Gibson was called on the carpet by Editor William de Grouchy. It seemed the Bell Syndicate was threatening to sue over Gibson's apparent theft of their Miss Fury. Gibson calmly produced the two-year-old Ledger version and a lawsuit was averted.

According to Gibson, Bell considered dropping Tarpe Mills's Miss Fury.

"They were having trouble with her," he recalled, "so they kicked her out. They were talking about continuing it, and

The Shadow in action from *Shadow Comics* #6.

wanted me to do the scripts!"

The Shadow newspaper strip lasted only a few years, thanks to World War II newspaper cutbacks. Near the end, it focused on the romantic triangle between Cranston, a jealous Margo and The Shadow's partner in peril, Valda. In a way Gibson pioneered the idea of a superhero torn between two competing women, which dominated Superman twenty years later.

Gibson was typically sanguine about the feature's demise, saying, "I felt it was just as well, as Vernon Greene had joined the air force and was no longer available to provide his inimitable work."

In fact, Greene had been guaranteed the first two hundred dollars of the creator's fee. As the war continued, it rarely made more than that, which meant Gibson made money only when he resold his scripts to S&S!

In 1943, the Shadow pulp dropped back to merely monthly status and for the first time in ten years, Gibson found he didn't have to write two whole novels a month. Any other writer would have taken a long vacation. Not Walt Gibson. He looked around to fill up his spare time. First, he struck an agreement with Street & Smith to put more effort into their

A sample of The Shadow's syndicated newspaper strip.

comic book, wrangling a page increase from $5.00 to $10.00.

Then Gibson assembled a bunch of Ledger artists into a shop under the art directorship of Charles Coll, with George Carney running the business side. Others artists included Russ Henderson, Lloyd Birmingham, Al Bare and James Hammon. A Philadelphia native, Gibson had enjoyed a longtime relationship with the Ledger Syndicate. Back in the 1920s, he did crossword puzzles and other features for them. When the syndicate folded during the war Gibson reorganized their out-of-work artists as a shop. They provided material for S&S, and then branched out to other publishers. Curtis was a big client. For them they did *Dick Cole*, among other titles. For Novelty Press, the shop produced *The Cadet* featuring West Pointer Ken Carter.

"Jacquet was the man that did all the comics for that outfit that the Curtis Publishing Company backed, Lloyd Jacquet," Gibson explained. "Of course, they owned the *Saturday Evening Post*. Well, Jacquet and Curtis back about the beginning of the war decided to publish some other stuff. They made a survey to find out what was selling and found out that comics were. So they took some of their younger editors and sent them over to New York to start a publishing company under an assumed name so nobody knew it was Curtis. They put out various things. Oddly I can't remember the titles of them because I didn't do much for them to begin with.

Bill Barnes Comics #1 (Street and Smith, 1940).

The Curtis line proved to be short-lived, although it was revived after the war.

"During the war, Jacquet got into the government service because he was French and worked on some of the commissions over in France," Gibson elaborated. "So after the war he took over and began to revive the comic stuff, which was partly commercial comics and partly regular comics."

***Super-Magic Comics* #1 (Street and Smith, May 1941).**

"We had very unusual artists," he noted. "We had one fellow named Russell Henderson. He did Blackstone. There was Al Bare. Our art director was Charlie Coll. He was Jack Binder's right-hand man. Charlie Coll was an old Ledger artist from Philadelphia. He came to New York and did a lot of comics work. He wanted to stay in Philadelphia, so we opened the studio there. Some of the artists were excellent. They were illustrators and put a real dash in the comics."

The Ledger Shop was purely an art shop, he recalled.

"I didn't do any scripts for them," he said. "All we did was the art. And I was the copy editor."

He had his hands full with his Street & Smith work anyway.

Gibson, who helped develop the revolutionary gimmick whereby his invisible Shadow was rendered as a blue surprint in the comic book, did not always take well to comic book superheroes. For about two years, his shop produced *Bulletman* for Fawcett. He recalled Fawcett insisting that every time Bulletman entered a building, he was required to swoop in through the window. Gibson couldn't understand why he couldn't just come through the door like a normal person and save the flying for action sequences.

Gibson remembered an argument he had with a Fawcett editor.

"I said, 'That's a hell of a way to start the thing. He should drop in and pay a visit like he was an ordinary person.' 'No,' they said. 'We can't do that because they want us to have him zoom like a bullet within the first page.' Instead of adopting another self like The Shadow did Lamont Cranston, he had to be Bulletman! They had all kinds of crazy taboos."

Gibson's comics career was dominated, naturally, by his work for Street & Smith *Shadow Comics*, which he scripted

from issue #2 to sometime in 1947, when he left Street & Smith in a contract dispute over ownership of The Shadow. The rest of his comic book career is pretty murky.

During the time he became involved with *The Return of Nick Carter*, for radio, Gibson was also writing the Nick Carter feature running in *Doc Savage* and *Shadow Comics*. It was an easy gig because it allowed him to recycle plots from one medium to another.

Gibson also found time to script the Bill Barnes stories for S&S's *Bill Barnes, America's Air Ace*, and caused a ruckus when, borrowing a fanciful idea from *Astounding* pulp editor John W. Campbell, he came up with a story that was blurbed on the cover as "How to Wipe the Japs Actually Off the Maps!" World War II was raging, and the novel concept Campbell offered was one that in reality was a top secret—the atom bomb.

"I dug into some Japanese lore," he noted, "And I found that there was a tradition that some day the whole of Japan would tilt up and flop into the Pacific deep. So that's what our bomb did to it in the double spread—it showed the whole island going over!"

When the July 1942 *Bill Barnes, America's Air Ace* hit the stands, with that boastful blurb underscored with a "Based on Cold Scientific Fact," government agents swooped down on the Street & Smith offices. Gibson and Campbell had to produce articles from old science magazines to clear themselves of suspicion. Suspicion of what, they wouldn't learn until the first A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima three years later.

Another Gibson brainchild was Street & Smith's 1942 one-shot, *Devil Dogs*. He scripted the entire issue, focusing on Rod Roger and his Rangers, the Boy Rangers, covering the U.S. Rangers from the Revolutionary War to WWII. Gibson pitched the project as *The Rangers*, but S&S decided the Marines would sell more copies and front-loaded the book with features on that branch of the service.

"We even had the Canine Corps," Gibson noted. "That was one of the best ones. Russell Henderson just laughed his head off when he drew it. They were training the dogs, and the dogs were holding these conversations. They only came knee-high to these guys, so I had the voice balloons down there for what the dogs were saying while the men were talking above. 'I wonder what these goofs are gonna make us do next.' Things of that sort. That was a great comic. Most of these were done at the Ledger Syndicate place that I took care of during the war."

As a baseball fan—his photographic memory gave him perfect recall of baseball stats going back a century—Gibson was a frequent contributor to S&S's *True Sport Picture Stories*.

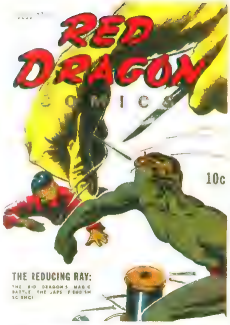
Few comics historians know that Walter Gibson was also the driving force behind the bizarre comic book career of Harry Blackstone, the famous stage magician. Four different publishers produced Blackstone comic books, and Walter B. Gibson was the prime mover on all of them.

It all started in 1941. Gibson had a deal with his friend Blackstone to produce comic-book sized program books that were sold at his shows and on newsstands. But by 1941, the printers were too busy producing the early flood of comic books to bother with promotional one-shots anymore.

***Super-Magician Comics* Vol. 4 No. 7 (Street and Smith, Nov 1945).**

***Super-Magician Comics* Vol. 2 No. 2 (Street and Smith, Jun 1943).**

***Super-Magician Comics* Vol. 3 No. 1 (Street and Smith, May 1944).**



***Red Dragon Comics* #9 (Street and Smith, Jan 1944).**

"Street and Smith were always thinking of doing new comics at that time," Gibson recalled. "So, the deal I proposed was this: The comics were selling for a dime and would they give Blackstone returns at 5 cents a piece? That meant that Blackstone could order a thousand a week, hold a matinee on Saturday and the theatre would pay 5 cents.

"So I called Street and Smith and talked to William de Grouchy: 'How many do you have to print to make a comic book go over?' He said: 'We could get by with 50,000 returns and stash 50,000 or so.' I said, 'Fine, I've got your 50,000 for a year. Blackstone will buy them at a nickel a piece. At cost.' 'Oh, boy!' he says. 'That's great! You can't lose.' So we made a deal right then."

De Grouchy was an S&S promotions man who was elevated to ramrodding their comics line because no pulp editor would touch it.

"I took a drawing room on the day train from Boston to New York and knocked out the first script to *Super Magician*," Gibson continued. "They had some other things they could throw in the first issue. But we began to run more magic-related things as *Super-Magician* went along."

Super-Magic Comics #1 was a sellout. Approximately 200,000 were printed. With the second, it became *Super-Magician*. It was a strange comic. Every feature was devoted to magic or stage magicians. There was Blackstone, Tao Anwar, Boy Magician, and Red Dragon, who spun off into his own title. By the second year, there were so many conjurors and prestidigitators populating *Super-Magician* you'd think the real Blackstone would have ordered these upstarts out of his title. But *Super-Magician* proved too successful.

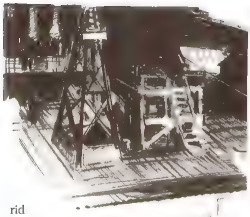
"They sold out so fast and did so well with it that they couldn't supply Blackstone with the copies he wanted," Gibson explained. "They were selling everything out. See, what they did, they did not send them *all* out. They kept some in reserve. Every newsstand that sold its quota could get more. So when they finally came to take stock of what they had left over, they had been shipped out. They didn't do that business of just returning a cover to get credit. They had them all sitting at the place. They gave Blackstone the surplus, you see. He plugged it at the show. It was beautiful."

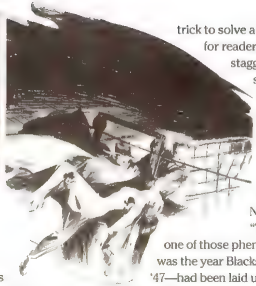
Super-Magician lasted six years. Jack Binder was the first Blackstone artist. James Hammon did most of them. It was one of Kurt Schaffenberger's earliest assignments for the Binder shop. The title probably would have run longer had Street & Smith not gotten corporate.

"In their stupidity," Gibson remembers, "they came up one time and said they had all rights to any comics as well as to magazine stories. Well, that was all right with The Shadow, but it wasn't all right with *Super-Magician*. So I just told them they couldn't. I called a lawyer on it, Whittenberg. He represented Blackstone. He wasn't going to let them use the stuff. Blackstone was letting them use it without any payment. He reserved the rights to do whatever he wanted with his own name.

"In fact, the *Blackstone* radio program that we were getting up was utilizing some of the same plots that were in the comics, so we had to stop it. And that was when we started *Blackstone, Master Magician*. That was done by William C. Popper, who also published under the name of Vital Publications. And the reason they took it on was they had paper quota. The war was still on, and they had paper and were in the position to go ahead with it. But they wanted to get

***Blackstone Master Magician Comics* #1 (Street and Smith, Mar-Apr 1946).**





rid of it as the paper quotas came back. So he made a deal with Gaines, who had Educational Comics."

Blackstone was proving to have more lives than a cat. The Vital version, called *Blackstone, Master Magician Comics*, picked up the month after the last Blackstone issue of *Super-Magician*. It ran but three issues, with art by Charles Coll (who had done some of the S&S *Blackstones*), E. C. Stoner, Lloyd Birmingham and Frank Frollo. A year passed. Then EC published *Blackstone, the Magician Fights Crime* #1, dated Fall 1947. Then one of the pivotal events in comics history intervened.

"Gaines actually took it over, starting it," Gibson recalled. "I came in from Akron, Ohio where I had been with Blackstone, and had a meeting with Gaines. When I got to New York for lunch with Gaines on Monday, they were looking for Gaines' body up on Lake Placid. He had been out on a ChrisCraft coasting along with some people that were swimming. While he was watching the swimmers, this crazy gal came along driving another ChrisCraft at about 40 miles per hour, hit his and sank him. And the company couldn't go on with it."

The last stop for poor Blackstone was Martin Goodman, whose Atlas comics produced three issues of *Blackstone, The Magician*, picking up the EC numbering. According to Gibson, Vital and Goodman were connected in some obscure way. Blackstone resurfaced in two Wisco miniature comics, which Gibson was involved with, based on the fact that other Gibson properties such as the Black Phantom and China Boy (Gibson's magician-wife's performing rooster) were featured in later giveaways.

Super-Magician survived Blackstone's exit by a year. When S&S lost the Blackstone rights, Gibson simply cloned a new prestidigitator, Nigel Elliman, Ace of Magic, and continued scripting! The change came so suddenly that the first Elliman exploit was an inventory Blackstone tale re-lettered. Blackstone's white hair was blackened, his fictional assistant Rhoda Brent was replaced by a brunette, Lorna Doane, and a Chinese juggler named Ling Foo was added to the cast. Elliman's formal introduction came in the next issue. The stories were virtually the same, and *Super-Magician* continued seamlessly. Every story revolved around Elliman employing a trick to solve a mystery, then explaining the trick for readers. When the final Elliman tales staggered into print in 1947, some looked suspiciously like old unpublished Blackstone's pulled out of inventory and doctored to fit.

Super-Magician vanished, only to be replaced by yet another short-lived Gibson magic comic, *Ghost Breakers*, starring still another real-life magician, Dr. Bill Neff!

"The way that happened was another one of those phenomenal things," Gibson noted. "It was the year Blackstone—I traveled with him around '47—had been laid up, and wasn't out with his show. I stopped in Corinth, Michican, his home town, to pick up things that belonged to me. And there is Bill Neff, at the shop of Percy Abbotts, the magical place, to get some equipment. He had a great big truck that said: DR. NEFF'S MADHOUSE OF MYSTERY and had all these weird things painted all over it—ghosts and everything. We were talking about comic books and I said, 'Bill, how about one called *Ghost Breakers*?' So I picked up the phone and sold that."

Dr. Neff was launched in *Red Dragon Comics*, then graduated to his own title. Despite Bob Powell art, *Ghost Breakers* ran only two issues—proving that Bill Neff was no Harry Blackstone. (Gibson later revived Neff for Charlton's *Racket Squad in Action* and *Sherlock Holmes*.) But it's amazing when you think about it. In the 1940s, the comic book field was so lucrative and diverse that a concept like Blackstone not only sold well, but publisher after publisher would pick up the title when the previous one dropped it. The *Blackstone, the Magic Detective* radio show which Gibson also scripted probably played a significant role in the comic's longevity.

When *The Shadow* pulp finally expired in 1949, Gibson plunged deeper into comics. He kept no records, and so the full staggering totality of his contributions to the field may never be known. But among his posthumous effects were stacks of comics, all of which presumably contain his un-bylined work.

The list boggles the mind: *Space Adventures, Out of the Night, Space Patrol, Planet Comics, Space Worlds, Strange Worlds, Space Detective, Astonishing, Space Busters,*

Last issue of *The Shadow* pulp magazine, 1949.

Space Detective, *Crusader from Mars*, *Space Squadron*, *Journey Into Unknown Worlds*, *Space Action*, *Tom Corbett Space Cadet*, *Buck Rogers*, *Movie Comics*, *Exposed*, *Guilty*, *Sam Hill*, *Kerry Drake*, *Authentic Police Cases*, *Police Comics*, *Law Breakers*, *Crime and Justice*, *GI Battle*, *Battle Report*, *War Front*, *Top Secrets*, *Strange*, *Voodoo*, *The Saint*, *Science Comics*, *Rocket to the Moon*, *Straight Arrow*, and easily dozens more. He wrote for publishers ranging from Avon to Ziff-Davis. Other than Batman—*Batman* #68 and #69 apparently contain stuff by him—and an unidentified Captain Marvel story in *Marvel Family* #63—Gibson scripted no major superheroes.

But Walter Gibson did create another long-running detective hero, J. Chippendale "Chip" Gardner for *Crime Does Not Pay*.

"*Crimes Does Not Pay* was going along," said Gibson, "and Charles Biro and Bob Wood decided to get up a special detective for a special title. They named the fellow Chip Gardner. They needed somebody to do Chip Garner, and I took the job. So, I wrote all the Chip Gardner stories in *Crime Does Not Pay*."

Chip Gardner was cover-featured through issues #87-103. This was the period when the title's look was beefed up with painted covers. George Tuska drew the first installment. Bob Fujitani did most of the rest. At this point in his career, Gibson's scripts were recognizable by their incredibly text-heavy captions and word balloons. He never heard of the 25-word limit for balloons, and his captions could soar to 100 words!

"Also," Gibson added, "in *Crime and Punishment*, there was a section of a whodunit story. By the time you got to page 5 or 6, the clues would be analyzed and it would refer back to something in the story. I'm not sure, I think that was the one where you had to turn the page over to get the answer. But I did all of those for *Crime and Punishment*. I was pretty well peaking in the comic field, in the post-Shadow period."

Fred Guardineer drew the feature for issues #27-44.

Gibson was also proving adept at making the rounds. Charlton editor Al Fago was resistant to his script proposals, but publisher Ed Levy liked them. So Gibson came in prepared with extra premises. By the time Fago had passed on the first two or three, Levy would become impatient with Fago, resulting in a sure sale on the balance of the plots.

"So I'd sell my two or three and I'd stop off at St. John's and sell the other ones on the way back!" Gibson laughed.

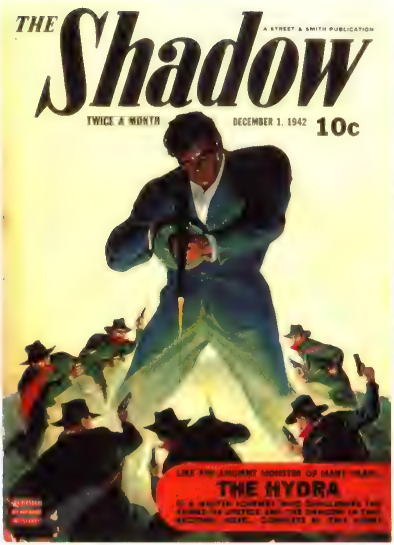
He specialized in crime and horror stories during the early '50s, when comics were under serious scrutiny. Gibson did his best to give the censors the shivers.

"I had a script called 'Spider Man,'" he recalled. "I did it for *The Thing* or some similar magazine. "This young couple got married. This odd-looking old man owned the house. He had an upstairs attic and he didn't want anyone to go in that. And this gal goes in the attic and my God, a gigantic spider comes after her—and he's got a man's head! Her husband just rescues her in time. They suddenly realize that this was the guy himself! He was like a vampire, but he was really half-man, half-spider. To get rid of him, they had to set fire to the damn place. At the finish, I said, 'Warning to the Reader: This is all true!'"

A former carnival magician in his younger days, Gibson took inspiration from a sideshow illusion called Spidora, a half-girl, half-spider executed with trick mirrors.

But Gibson's most notorious comic book work was Charlton's infamous *Space Western*, drawn by Stan Campbell and John Belfi.

"It's funny how



1942 Shadow novel, *The Hydra*, was cited by one Golden Age comics editor as the perfect model for a comic book story

seriously these people took the comics," he mused. "They said, 'Oh, somebody bought out *Space Western*.' As though that was a silly asinine thing. They went, '*Space Western*. Ha-Ha-Ha.' Well, one day we got talking about different themes and Ed Levy said, 'Say, we should get out a book of *Space Western* stories. Have the cowboys running into guys coming down in the flying saucers.' So I started up *Space Western*. I did most of those for him."

Gibson scripted all of the adventures of Spurs Jackson and his Space Vigilantes, as well as the Strong Bow backup. But the idea didn't die there. Gibson recycled it for a 1952 newspaper strip he did with his old Blackstone collaborator, Elmer C. Stoner.

"There was a guy named Higgins who was in the syndicate business," Gibson recollected. "I met him through the Ledger Syndicate. We decided to do a comic called *Rick Kane, Space Marshal*. Stoner did the first for me, and it was like *Star Wars*, taking off from the world on a trip to Mars. I treated Mars just as you would treat an airplane flight across the ocean. We had it in the *New York Post*. It ran as a daily. Then there were some problems. Stoner quit. Higgins was handling it. He was one of these promoters, and he wanted to get more money out of it. So he was bleeding him and trying to grab money from the people. And he wasn't paying Stoner. And we were having trouble meeting our deadlines."

Other artists came in, but the handwriting was on the wall. *Rick Kane, Space Marshall* folded. Gibson also recycled the *Space Western* concept for several Wisco giveaways starring Jim Solar, Space Sheriff produced for Vital Publications. He scripted a total of 19 Jim Solar giveaways.

Gibson retained fond memories of the artist better known as E. C. Stoner.

"Oh, Elmer Stoner was quite a guy. Elmer Stoner was a colored man. He lived in an apartment house. He had the top apartment. He was the only colored man in the apartment, and very friendly with the tenants. Well, one day they came in and there was a big hullabaloo. The guy that owned the apartment said he was going to sell the place. They were afraid rents were going to change. They were protesting. And Stoner comes in. He stopped at the apartments coming up. 'I want to talk to you about the house. Don't worry about it. There's not going to be any raise in the rent,' he says, 'because I bought the place!'"

In 1953, Gibson started a Spirit-style tabloid called *Arrow: The Family Comics Weekly* and scripted most of the contents, including Batman, Straight Arrow, Debbie Dean, Inspector West, Bruce Gentry, and Captain Galaxy. The project died around the time Gibson discovered his backer hadn't bothered with the formality of getting permission to license Batman!

"DC raised a squawk," Gibson explained. "They said, no, they hadn't given the okay. By that time, Batman had become fairly important to them. They had not given the rights to these people to put it into their tabloid!"

Amid the legal untangling, Gibson landed a brief gig scripting Batman comic books.

"Mort Weisinger got hold of me and wanted me to do Batman," he recounted. "So I did about

"The New Crimes of Two-Face" in *Batman* #68 may be Gibson's work.

In 1981, Walter Gibson enjoyed a brief comics comeback when he penned a rare Batman prose story for *Detective Comics* #500, called "Batman Encounters Gray Face." It was probably the only time he ever got an honest byline in a comic book.

half a dozen. That was a lot of fun. We talked the plots over beforehand, so it was fairly easy. The only thing was there wasn't too much of it. They had some scripts ahead. He said I'd do other things with him, and then got sidetracked."

Stories like "The Buttons of Doom," "The Batman Expose" and "The New Crimes of Two-Face" in *Batman* #68 and #69 may be Gibson's work.

Gibson recalled being loaned a copy of *Batman* #1 as reference during the assignment. Even then, Weisinger considered it too valuable to let him keep.

Despite two brief brushes with Batman, Gibson haughtily dismissed the Caped Crusader as merely "a clowned-up version of The Shadow." In fact, he once confided to me that he found comics and their conventions pretty silly. Yet there's a famous story that his 1942 Shadow novel, *The Hydra*, was cited by one Golden Age comics editor as the perfect model for a comic book story—causing a run on that issue, much to the consternation of S&S. And without a doubt, Gibson's seminal Shadow novels with their super crooks and recurring villains directly inspired the first generation of comic book creators.

Unfortunately, Gibson seldom talked about his comic book career. He kept no records, and filed his script carbons haphazardly. His personal file copies only hint at his contributions to the field.

Could Walter Gibson really have written Avon's *Robot Men of the Lost Planet*? Or launched a major '50s sub-genre with *Hot Rods and Racing Cars* for Charlton? And ghosted *The Great Society Comic Book*, starring Super LBJ?

As the old line goes, "Only The Shadow Knows...."

One certain DC credit was the story, "The Hands from Nowhere," which appeared in *Strange Adventures* #22. Reprinted years later, Editor Julius Schwartz finally revealed the anonymous author's true identity. (*Strange Adventures* #17 and #18, and *Mystery in Space* #7 may also contain Gibson's work.)

Walter Gibson's intensive comic book career wound down in the mid-1950s, as the beleaguered industry crashed. But he continued doing commercial comics much later, through a man named Julien Proskauer and William C. Popper's Vital Publications.

"Proskauer had the William C. Popper Company, which printed some very fine things, including Nabisco covers and also insurance policies for ETNA, one of the big ones," recalled Gibson. "They also had an interest in the Greater Buffalo Press which printed comics, and it printed most of its comics for newspaper comics. But it could also print booklets. It used a binding that didn't have staples in it, and they were particularly good on binding up commercial comics. That was why I did various commercial comics."

Gibson scripted, copyedited and performed other editorial tasks on a host of commercial comics ranging from the *Captain Fortune* series of miniature giveaways to a series on the wonders of power steering for most of the major Detroit auto manufacturers.

The Department of Agriculture was another client. They produced a series of comics on conservation issues. Gibson recalled accompanying Proskauer to Washington, DC, where he met with a Democratic representative while Proskauer met with a Republican on the other side of an important congressional election. Between them, they landed both accounts.

"We had two different artists do the stuff," Gibson chuckled. "One fellow named Frollo. Frank Frollo. The other was Lloyd Burmingham. One was printed by Vital, which was a subsidiary of William C. Popper. The other was produced by William C. Popper."

Eventually, that kind of work petered out and Gibson dropped all involvement in the field he once saturated in his industrious but semi-anonymous way.

In 1981, Walter Gibson enjoyed a brief comics comeback when he penned a rare Batman prose story for *Detective Comics* #500, called "Batman Encounters Gray Face." It was probably the only time he ever got an honest byline in a comic book.

TUNING IN...

by Bhob Stewart

The halfway mark in the 20th Century was a transitional milestone for American popular culture. As adventurous pulp magazines began to disappear, the mid-century brought a breath of fresh air with more sophisticated digest-size publications, such as *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Galaxy Science Fiction*. By 1954, the pulps had vanished. As paperback racks expanded, Ballantine Books arrived with eye-catching, innovative titles, including *Mad* reprints. The film industry, shuddering as taverns installed TV sets to attract customers, became even more worried when antennas started to sprout from residential rooftops. Live television borrowed from the conventions of stage productions with shows such as *Admiral Broadway Revue* (1949) and the *U.S. Steel Hour* (1953-63), a continuation of the radio series that began in 1945 as *Theatre Guild on the Air*.

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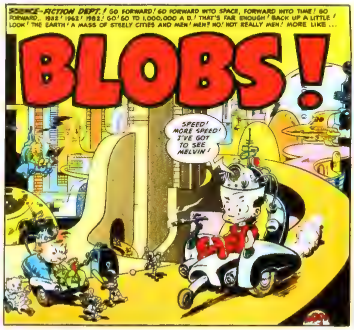
On the surface, *Mad*'s first story, "Hoohah!," drawn with a wild abandon by Jack Davis, appears aimed at the EC horror line, yet a closer look shows the influence of radio's Suspense.

Between 1929 and 1962—the Golden Age of Radio—millions followed their favorites with the turn of a dial. "Tired of the everyday grind? Ever dream of a life of romantic adventure? Want to get away from it all? We offer you...*Escape!*" On sidewalks throughout small-town America, strolling beneath streetlamps, one could hear comedy, drama, news, panel discussions, dance band remotes and quiz shows playing faintly inside different houses on each block. At night, glowing car radios illuminated dashboards as drivers traveled dark highways with *The Mysterious Traveler* and *The Whistler*: "I am the Whistler, and I know many things, for I walk by night. I know many strange tales, many secrets hidden in the hearts of men and women who have stepped into the shadows. Yes, I know the nameless terrors of which they dare not speak." That opening was intoned along with the echo of footsteps and Wilbur Hatch's haunting theme, whistled weekly by Dorothy Roberts for 13 years. Spike Jones provided the parody: "I am the Whistler, and I know many things, for I walk by night. I have to—I can't sleep."

Back then, it seemed as though those magical radio sounds had always been there, year after year, broadcasting through static from some far distant Tower of Babel, but then Destiny stepped into the shadows and twisted the dial. One by one, familiar voices vanished from the airwaves. The magnificent audio tapestry began to unravel, and once-popular shows faded away into an echoing canyon until all were gone. It was an immense entertainment arena, the Theater of the Mind, yet during the 1950s, it was wiped from existence almost as if it had never happened, swept away into a dusty memory hole.

In comics the post-WWII transition happened when superheroes hung up their colorful costumes to make way for a more realistic approach in the pages of EC's New Trend. Since the EC editors had grown up listening to radio, this was reflected in their stories, names and references. The name of *Mad*'s Alfred E. Neuman derived from comedian Henry Morgan's radio series. Morgan began with *Meet Mr. Morgan* on WOR in 1940, continuing until 1950 with *Here's Morgan* on Mutual, ABC and NBC. One gag on his show involved a reference to Alfred Newman (1901-70), who scored many films and also composed the fanfare that accompanies 20th Century Fox's opening film logo. The possible linkage is that Laird Cregar portrayed Sir Henry Morgan in *The Black Swan* (1942) with Tyrone Power, and the Oscar-nominated score for that film was by Newman. Listening to the sarcastic Morgan's brash broadcasts, EC editors took



"Blobs!," which introduced EC readers to the humorous side of Wally Wood. This was a satire of E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops," first published in the Oxford and Cambridge Review in 1909.

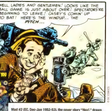
note of the Alfred Newman gag and twisted it into Alfred E. Neuman. Morgan later became a *Mad* contributor, beginning with "The Truth about Cowboys" in issue 33.

Harvey Kurtzman's original concept for *Mad* was simply to deliver a humorous jab at other EC titles and the various comic book genres, from romance and horror to mystery and adventure. But radio was obviously the target when the first issue of *Mad* (Oct-Nov 1952) appeared with its prominent "Tales Calculated to Drive You" cover blurb mocking the well-known opening of radio's long-run (1942-62) crime-thriller anthology: "And now…another tale well-calculated to keep you in…*Suspense!*"

On the surface, *Mad*'s first story, "Hoohah!," drawn with a wild abandon by Jack Davis, appears aimed at the EC horror line, yet a closer look shows the influence of radio's *Suspense*. Panels filled with large lettering simulate sound effects one could hear on *Suspense*, *Escape* and other thriller shows, and four panels even attempt the type of echo effect familiar to radio listeners. "Hoohah!" was the cover story, and Kurtzman's cover also carried a hint of *Suspense*, anticipating the arrival of the spooky main character, still unseen—like *Mad* itself.

Immediately following "Hoohah!" came the beautifully cartooned "Blobs!," which introduced EC readers to the humorous side of Wally Wood. This was a satire of E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops," first published in the *Oxford and Cambridge Review* in 1909. Forster wrote his science-fiction story as "a counter-blast to one of the heavens of H.G. Wells." Earth's inhabitants have relocated below ground where the Machine takes care of all their needs. Vashti is disturbed when her son, Kuno, returns from the Earth's surface, predicting the end of the Machine. A major malfunction erupts because "the Mending Apparatus was itself in need of repair." Kurtzman borrowed the repair concept with his dialogue, "Prove? Prove? Melvin! What…what if the machine that repairs the machine…breaks?"

Forster's futuristic inventions include extrapolations of email, streaming webcasts and moving armchairs. Vashti "set her chair in motion. The chair, like the music, was worked by machinery." Forster's machine chairs added a clever visual touch to Kurtzman's "Blobs!" In Dennis Potter's final BBC/Channel 4 production, *Cold Lazarus* (1996), set 350 years in the future, chairs move about in a choreographed manner with no visible controls, seemingly responsive to the sitters' mental commands. In our real world, Dean Kamen, the son of EC artist Jack Kamen, spent eight years developing his six-wheeled Ibot Transporter, the stair-climbing "mobility system" that balances on two wheels. For a demonstration in 2000, Kamen sat in the Ibot and climbed



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Mad #2 (EC, Dec-Jan 1952-53), the cover story "Hex!," drawn by Davis, displayed Mad's first caricature of a media personality—sportscaster Mel Allen (1913-96), famed as the "Voice of the Yankees" from 1939 to 1964.

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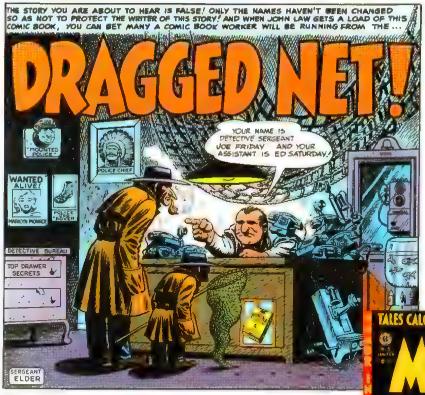
With "Melvin!" (*Mad* #2) Kurtzman tweaked Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan, the first major syndicated radio serial (1934-36).



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Mad #3 (EC, Jan–Feb 1953) featured two radio lampoons, "The Lone Stranger!" (Davis) and "Dragged Net!" (Bill Elder).

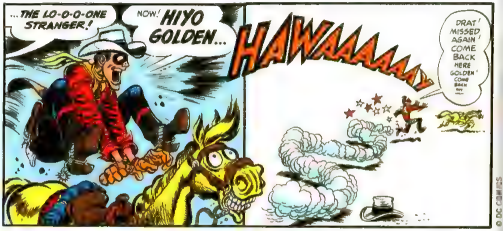
the stairs from a Paris Metro station to the restaurant level of the Eiffel Tower. Media coverage of Kamen's Segway and Ibot sometimes described him as the "son of a *Mad* artist," although Jack Kamen's work for *Mad* was minimal. (Why not "son of a *Weird Science* artist"?)

Possibly Kurtzman read Forster's story when it was reprinted in *The Collected Tales of E.M. Forster* (Knopf, 1947). Yuri Rasovsky's *Hollywood Theater of the Ear* adapted the Forster classic to radio for the *2000X* series (on NPR in 2000-01), and that adaptation, hosted by Harlan Ellison, is currently available as an audio book. The story can also be read online [http://www.plexus.org/forster/index html], assuming the Internet doesn't stop.

Comic books were required to run a certain amount of typeset material to qualify for second class mailing permits, and the text-only one-pager, "Cosmo McMoon" (*Mad* #2), told of radio interference from a "berserk transmitter" that jumbled together the radio networks: "Jock Beanny appears to be playing first violin on the Boston Symphony broadcast!" In that same issue, the cover story "Hex!," drawn by Davis, displayed *Mad's* first caricature of a media personality—sportscaster Mel Allen (1913-96), famed as the "Voice of the Yankees" from 1939 to 1964. It was Allen who popularized the phrase, "That ball is going, going, gone!" With "Melvin!" (*Mad* #2) Kurtzman tweaked Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan*, the first major syndicated radio serial (1934-36). A new *Tarzan* radio series was being broadcast on CBS (1952-53) at the time *Mad* #2 was published, and that same year, the word "Melvin" was often used as running gag by Martin and Lewis on TV's *Colgate Comedy Hour*.

Mad #3 (Jan-Feb 1953) featured two radio lampoons, "The Lone Stranger!" (Davis) and "Dragged Net!" (Bill Elder). Kurtzman captured clichés heard for years (1933-56) on *The Lone Ranger*, and on the last page of "The Lone Stranger!" a character is seen reading from the radio script. Another *Lone Ranger* parody received airplay in 1955 when Stan Freberg recorded "The Lone Psychiatrist" (Capitol F3138).

Jack Webb's *Dragnet* debuted on radio in 1949, and the success of Webb's radio program led to the *Dragnet* TV series, beginning January 1952. Since the show had been televised months before *Mad* began and "Dragged Net!" displayed no caricature of Webb, some readers at the time concluded Kurtzman did not own a TV set. When John Benson questioned Kurtzman about this peculiar lapse, he responded, "You may be right. You may have caught something that I'm not aware of. It looks as if I hadn't seen *Dragnet*, as I look through here. Son of a gun. See, I fashioned them after Sherlock Holmes and



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Wood's "Superduperman!" (*Mad* #4) was a turning point, with Kurtzman deciding to tackle major comic-book characters.

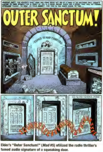
Dick Tracy. I hadn't realized that until this minute. I wasn't thinking in visual terms, and I always think visually, so it could have been possible that I didn't see it on TV."

Shortly after "Dragged Net!" appeared, Capitol Records released Freberg's "St. George and the Dragonet" (F2596), selling one million copies in the first three weeks. ("The legend you are about to hear is true. Only the needle should be changed to protect the record.") The Freberg follow-up that same year was "Christmas Dragnet" (Capitol, F2671), reissued in 1954 as "Yulenet." (F2986).

The Shadow was introduced in *The Detective Story Hour* (CBS, 1930). The first series to use *The Shadow* as its title was heard two years later, continuing on CBS, Mutual and NBC until 1954. *Mad* #4 featured the Shadowskeedeeboomboom in Elder's "Shadow!" According to Kurtzman, his inspiration for that odd character name came from tongue-twisting scat phrases sung by the great Yiddish entertainer Aaron Lebedeff (aka Lebedev, 1873-1960), often credited as the major influence on Danny Kaye. Kurtzman could have seen Lebedeff perform during the late 1940s as part of a lower Manhattan show that included an unauthorized stage version of *The Jolson Story* (1946).

Wood's "Superduperman!" (*Mad* #4) was a turning point, with Kurtzman deciding to tackle major comic-book characters. Kurtzman's comic strip and comic book choices often were ones also riding the airwaves. *The Adventures of Superman* aired from 1940 to 1950, and the character returned when acclaimed BBC Radio producer/director Dirk Maggs fashioned new *Superman* audio adventures between 1988 and 1993. The Time Warner Audiobooks release of Magg's *Superman Lives!* (1993) was voted *Publishers Weekly*'s Spoken Word Audio of the Year, and it also won the American Booksellers Association Audie Award for Best Dramatization.

In *Mad* #5 (Jun-Jul 1953), two radio detectives were blended into one for "Kane Keen! Private Eye," drawn by



Elder's "Outer Sanctum!" (*Mad* #5) utilized the radio thriller's famed audio signature of a squeaking door.

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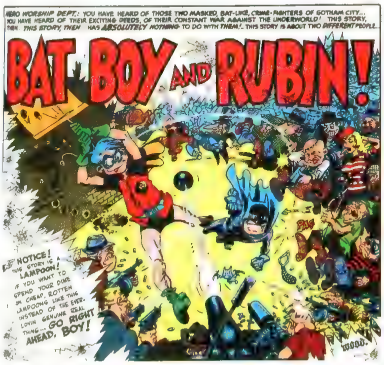
The sixth issue led off with Wood's "Teddy and the Pirates!" and the opening "Gonnnnnng!" in the splash caption immediately evoked the *Terry and the Pirates* radio serial (1937-48), adapted from Milton Caniff's popular strip.

Davis. On radio, *Martin Kane, Private Eye*, starring William Gargan, debuted August 1949, and the TV version, also starring Gargan, began a month later. With Lloyd Nolan and other actors portraying Kane, it continued on radio until 1952, while the TV series remained until 1954. Fox published the 1950 *Martin Kane, Private Eye* comic book, which featured Gargan prominently in both the front cover and interior. Since Wood worked on several stories for that Fox book, it seemed odd that he wasn't given the assignment to do "Kane Keen! Private Eye." *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons* was one of the longest-running detective series on radio—1937 to 1955. The clichés of that series were also highlighted by Bob and Ray in their *Mr. Trace, Keener Than Most Persons*, a sketch series they often repeated with variations during the 1950s and 1960s.

Radio's *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* took its name from Simon and Schuster's line of Inner Sanctum mystery novels. The popularity of the radio series led to Universal's 1943-45 series of Inner Sanctum movies starring Lon Chaney Jr. The poster for Lew Landers' *noir*-styled *Inner Sanctum* (1948) prominently displayed a large book and radio microphone in its montage painting. As a framing device, Elder's "Outer Sanctum!" (*Mad* #5) utilized the radio thriller's famed audio signature of a squeaking door. The story's host, Ramon, was a cartoon interpretation of *Inner Sanctum*'s insidious Raymond (Raymond Edward Johnson). As drawn by Elder, not only the door squeaks but so does everything else—the floor, a finger in an ear, a pen and a mouse. Ramon dusts off a copy of *Crypt of Terror* #7 to tell the story. However, because of EC's numbering system, there was no *Crypt of Terror* #7. Instead, the story Ramon tells is a Kurtzman send-up of an Al Feldstein tale from the first issue of *The Haunt of Fear* ("The Thing in the Swamp") along with a trashing of "The Heap" comic book series. The Heap stories ran in *Airboy Comics* (beginning October 1946), and the bizarre creation was revived in 1971 for Skywald's *The Heap*.

The cover date of the first issue of *Mad* coincided with the last broadcast of *Inner Sanctum* (5 October 1952). *Inner Sanctum*'s long run (1941-52) ended as EC's New Trend sf/horror titles were in their third year. I had always assumed that the three EC horror hosts were inspired by *Inner Sanctum* until the day Bill Gaines told me that both he and EC editor Al Feldstein had listened during the 1930s to Alonzo Deen Cole's *The Witch's Tale* (1931-38). Thus, "Old Nancy, the witch of Salem" (Adelaide Fitz-Allen, Miriam Wolff, Martha Wentworth) was the inspiration for EC's Old Witch, who welcomed readers into *The Haunt of Fear*. A collection of 13 *Witch's Tale* scripts was published by Dunwich Press in 1998. One episode from the series can be heard online [http://www.oldtimeradioprograms.com/audio/



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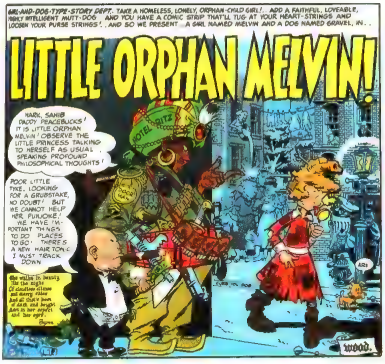
Wood's "Bat Boy and Rubin!" (Mad #8) lampooned DC's Batman. Beginning in 1945, Batman was portrayed by Matt Crowley on radio's *The Adventures of Superman*.



"Little Orphan Melvin!" (*Mad* #9), illustrated by Wood, eviscerated elements of Harold Gray's classic strip. On radio, *Little Orphan Annie* was a huge success as the first late-afternoon children's serial, running from 1930 to 1942.

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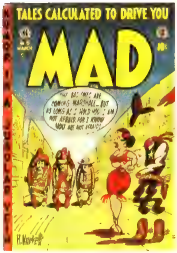

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The sixth issue led off with Wood's "Teddy and the Pirates!" and the opening "Gonnnnnng!" in the splash caption immediately evoked the *Terry and the Pirates* radio serial (1937-48), adapted from Milton Caniff's popular strip. "Melvin of the Apes!" swung back into action inside that same issue. Wood's "Smilin' Melvin!" (*Mad* #7) prompted some to recall that Zack Mosley's *Smilin' Jack* comic strip had been adapted to radio for a three-month run on the Mutual network in 1939. "Shermlock Shomes!" (*Mad* #7) made light of the Arthur Conan Doyle character seen in many films and heard on radio (1930-55); Kurtzman's characters returned in issue 16 with "The Hound of the Basketballs!"

The Lone Stranger rode again in *Mad* #8. That issue also featured radio sets in Kurtzman's "Hey Look!" pages, one showing Walter Winchell's voice booming from a small radio: "Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. America!" Winchell delivered news and gossip in his own special slanguage on radio for 27 years (1930-57) before moving on to TV. His usual opening, punctuated by a clicking telegraph key, was, "Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. North America and all the ships at sea. Let's go to press! Flash! New York..." Ballantine Books editor Bernard Shir-Cliff delivered a full-scale satire on Winchell's column in *Mad* #25,

Wood's "Bat Boy and Rubin!" (*Mad* #8) lampooned DC's *Batman*. Beginning in 1945, Batman was portrayed by Matt Crowley on radio's *The Adventures of Superman*. In 1989, with Bob Sessions as Batman, Dirk Maggs produced *Batman: The Lazarus Syndrome* for BBC Radio, followed by *Batman: Knightfall* in 1994.

"Little Orphan Melvin!" (*Mad* #9), illustrated by Wood, eviscerated elements of Harold Gray's classic strip. On radio, *Little Orphan Annie* was a huge success as the first late-afternoon children's serial, running from 1930 to 1942. To portray Annie, Shirley Bell, at age ten, left school early each weekday. She was still doing the role when she was 20 years old, while also playing Patsy Donovan on *Captain Midnight* (1939-49). In 1940, Ovaltine

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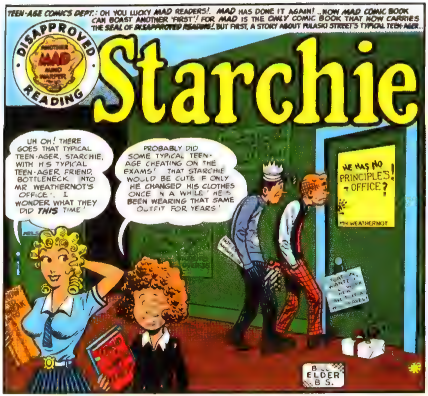
"Flesh Garden!" (*Mad* #11) spoofed Alex Raymond's science-fiction strip, which also was heard on radio as a short-lived series (1935-36) starring Gale Gordon as Flash Gordon.



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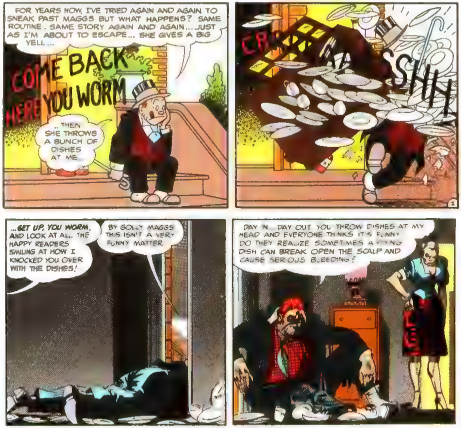
In "Starchie!" (*Mad* #12) Elder japed Bob Montana's characters, adapted to radio as *Archie Andrews* (1943-53).

shifted its sponsorship from *Little Orphan Annie* to *Captain Midnight*. Shirley Bell Cole, now 84, recalls, "I was the sole support of my family because of the Depression. I earned a sizable paycheck of $50 in 1930. That was a lot of money."

"Flesh Garden!" (*Mad* #11) spoofed Alex Raymond's science-fiction strip, which also was heard on radio as a short-lived series (1935-36) starring Gale Gordon as Flash Gordon. In the radio series, Flash and his friends crashed in the jungle and were rescued by Jungle Jim; the series then continued as *Jungle Jim* for the next 19 years. In that same issue, "Dragged Net!" was *Mad*'s first radio-TV satire, and unlike the earlier "Dragged Net!" it displayed a tightly rendered caricature of Jack Webb.

In "Starchie!" (*Mad* #12) Elder japed Bob Montana's characters, adapted to radio as *Archie Andrews* (1943-53). In that same issue, Davis' "Mark Trade!" tracked Ed Dodd's *Mark Trail*, a comic strip Davis had once worked on as an inker; the radio *Mark Trail*, starring Matt Crowley as forest ranger Trail, aired on Mutual and ABC from 1950 to 1952. Elder's "Manduck the Magician!" (*Mad* #14) gestured hypnotically and satirically at Lee Falk's *Mandrake the Magician*, adapted to the Mutual Broadcasting System in 1940-42 with Raymond Edward Johnson in the title role.

Elder's "Gasoline Valley!" (*Mad* #15) trumped Frank King's classic comic strip. The NBC radio adaptation of King's strip ran for three months in 1941 and utilized a unique gimmick: The storyline heard in a daily radio episode matched the comic strip published that morning. Possibly this was an idea intended to parallel the real time aspect of the strip, which was the focus of Kurtzman's satire. The program returned in 1948-49, and the strip was also adapted into two feature films—*Gasoline Alley* (1951) and *Corky of Gasoline Alley* (1951). *Mad* #17 witnessed the Army-McCarthy hearings (which aired on both radio and TV), and Freberg tackled the same subject in his 1954 recording "Point of Order" (Capitol F2838). In "Bringing Back Father!" (*Mad* #17) Elder and Bernard Krigstein



In "Bringing Back Father!" (*Mad* #17) Elder and Bernard Krigstein bifurcated George McManus' *Bringing Up Father*; a radio adaptation, starring Agnes Moorehead as Maggie, ran on the Blue Network for three months in 1941.

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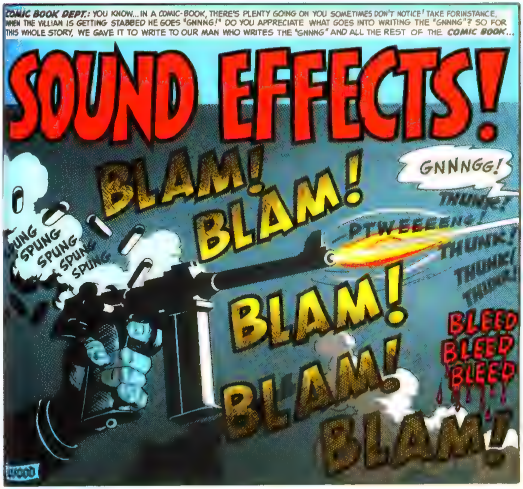


Mad #20 featured Wood's memorable "Sound Effects!," a seven-page story told with no captions and no dialogue balloons—only sound effects.

bifurcated George McManus' *Bringing Up Father*; a radio adaptation, starring Agnes Moorehead as Maggie, ran on the Blue Network for three months in 1941.

Mad #20 featured Wood's memorable "Sound Effects!," a seven-page story told with no captions and no dialogue balloons—only sound effects. Note the name on the door, indicating that Wood did eventually get to draw a parody of *Martin Kane, Private Eye*, after all. Possibly Kurtzman got the idea to do a story minus dialogue from Norman Corwin's "Anatomy of Sound" (7 September 1941) with Gale Sondergaard. In an interview with Roger Gregg (29 March 2003), Corwin commented, "Well, you know, sound can be spooky. I once wrote a program called 'The Anatomy of Sound' which is a kind of a presumptuous title. You cannot anatomize sound in a half hour, but I tried. For sound can tell stories. I had a whole scene in which the action could be followed very graphically by sound

alone." The concept was also done in a feature film; *The Thief* (1952), a spy thriller starring Ray Milland, has sound but no dialogue.

The cover of *Mad* #21, simulating the Johnson Smith novelty catalog and ads, shows a tiny ad, "Broadcast Thru Your Radio." This was a real gadget sold by Johnson Smith, a microphone that wired directly into the back of a radio set. However, one could hardly trick someone with the simple device; the wire was so short that the voice of a kid hiding behind a doorway was louder than the tinny sound emanating from the radio speaker. For "Believe It or Don't!" (*Mad* #23) Wood used an ink-and-pebbleboard technique to mimic the look of Robert Ripley's *Believe It or Not* panel, heard on radio in (1930-48) in a variety of formats. Ripley's research was by Austrian-born linguist Norbert Pearlroth, who spent almost every day of his life for 52 years digging up facts in the New York Public Library. Bob Clarke, who drew many of the later "Believe It or Nuts" pages for *Mad*, had been a staff artist for Ripley in 1943-44.

With issue 24 (Jul 1955), *Mad* switched its format from comic book to magazine. After Elder's "Radiodetectiveland" in issue 25 came a superb, surreal Wood depiction of DJ Al "Jazzbo" Collins' Purple Grotto ("What's All This Jazz about Jazz?") in *Mad* #31. Shortly after this six-page article appeared, NBC installed Collins as the host of the *Tonight!* show for two months in 1957.

Other 1957-58 issues carried contributions by Steve Allen, Bob and Ray (and their scriptwriter Tom Koch), Freberg, Ernie Kovacs, Henry Morgan and Jean Shepherd ("Night People vs. Creeping Meatballism"). Nearly a dozen Bob and Ray routines were illustrated for *Mad* between 1957 and 1959, but otherwise, radio was tuned out during the late 1950s as the magazine focused on movies, TV, advertising and other subjects. For owners of tape recorders, radio went from real to reel, from reel-to-reel to cassettes to MP3s. For others, the Golden Age of Radio became only a memory.

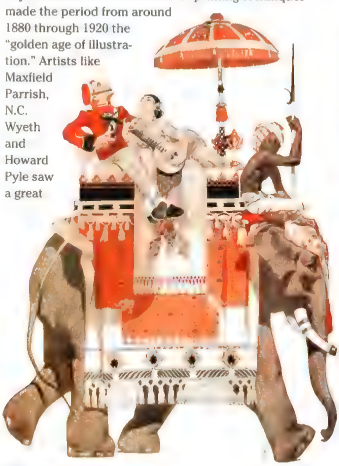
Rene Bull

THE VADEBONCOEUR COLLECTION OF IMAGES

by Russ Cochran

Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr. is a long-time comic book collector, historian, and dealer in and collector of vintage illustrated books featuring illustrative art of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century.

Imagine that you are an intelligent patron of the arts in the year 1900. Recorded music, radio, and movie entertainments were at this time either non-existent or in their infancy. The entertainment source was the printed page, either in a magazine or an illustrated book, and the artists who created the illustrations were the celebrities of their day. The advances made in color printing techniques made the period from around 1880 through 1920 the "golden age of illustration." Artists like Maxfield Parrish, N.C. Wyeth and Howard Pyle saw a great demand for their paintings and drawings both for illustrated books and art prints. In Germany the popular art and humor magazine *Jugend* featured the art of Heinrich Kley whose satirical pen drawings are still popular today. Magazines like the *Illustrated London News* were filled with new art by the British artists of the day like Charles Robinson or Kay Nielsen. In this country, magazines like *Puck*, *Life*, and *Judge* were breaking new ground with humor and political cartoons by artists like T. S. Sullivant and Winsor McCay. These were to form the beginnings of



F.X. Leyendecker

Joseph Levendecker
Lawson Ward

N.C. Wyeth

Gustav Tenggren

comic art, which became a staple of turn-of-the-century newspapers. In short, it was a period of great strides forward for all graphic artists and illustrators.

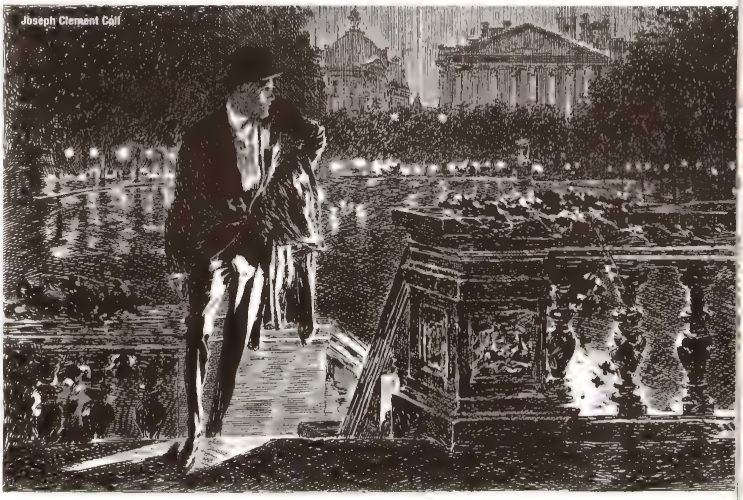
And, sadly, much of this work has been lost to future generations. Books from major publishers of the day featured full color illustrations by artists like Arthur Rackham and Willy Pogany. Later reprintings of these same books often omitted the illustrations or reproduced them in a muddy, unsatisfactory manner, making collector's items out of the earlier illustrated editions. For the past thirty-odd years, collectors like Jim Vadeboncoeur and Bud Plant have collected these treasures and the even more fragile magazines because of this great artwork.

So it was only a matter of time before someone like Jim got the great idea to republish these long-lost images in a quality format. *The Vadeboncoeur Collection of ImageS* is the rather unwieldy title of Jim's magazine devoted to reprinting these images. Jim has figured out the best way to scan these classic images and reprint them in color in all their glory in a 9"x12" format on high quality paper. All of the artists mentioned here and dozens more appear in the magazine, most reproduced exactly as they were printed 80 to 100 years ago.

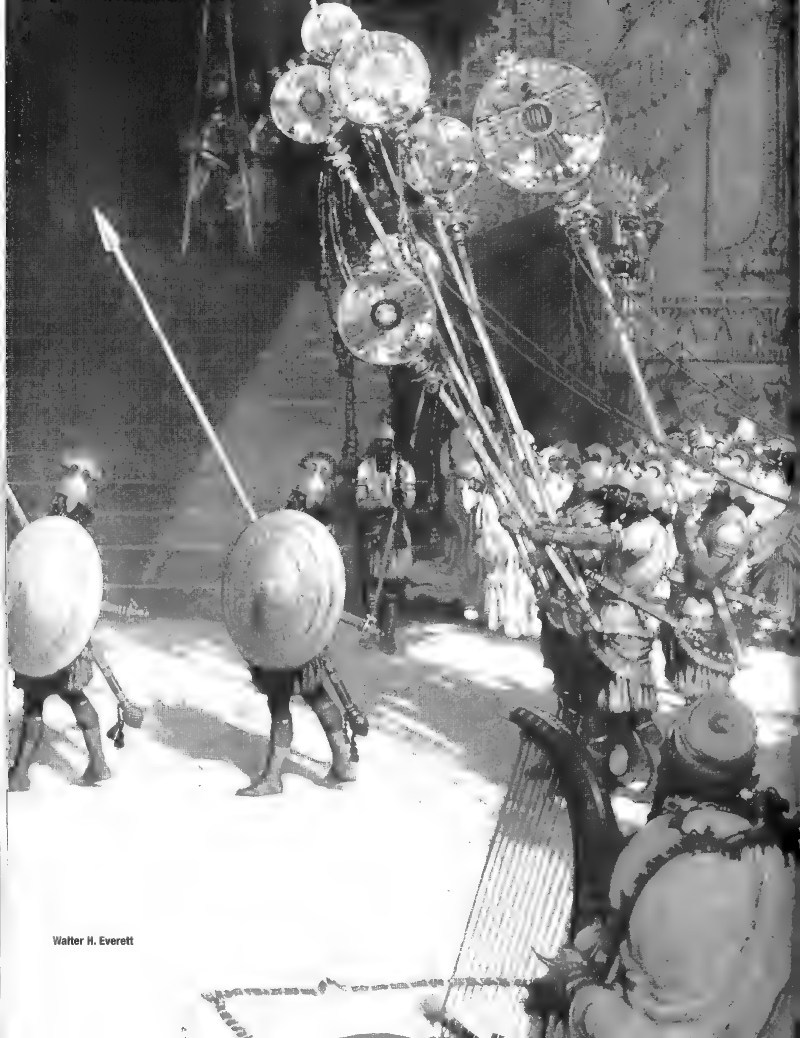
E.J. Detmold

The first color issue of *ImageS* appeared in 2001 and was 24 pages. The second issue increased in size to 32 pages and the seventh and most recent issue was 44 pages. There are also two thick black and white annuals of 96 and 112 pages. Some issues focus attention on a few specific artists while others present a rich cross-section of artists from the period, with examples of their best color work reproduced with outstanding clarity and attention to detail. Both Annuals feature extended sections on T.S. Sullivant, with a who's who of other contributors including Norman Lindsay, Orson Lowell, Harry Rountree and dozens more.

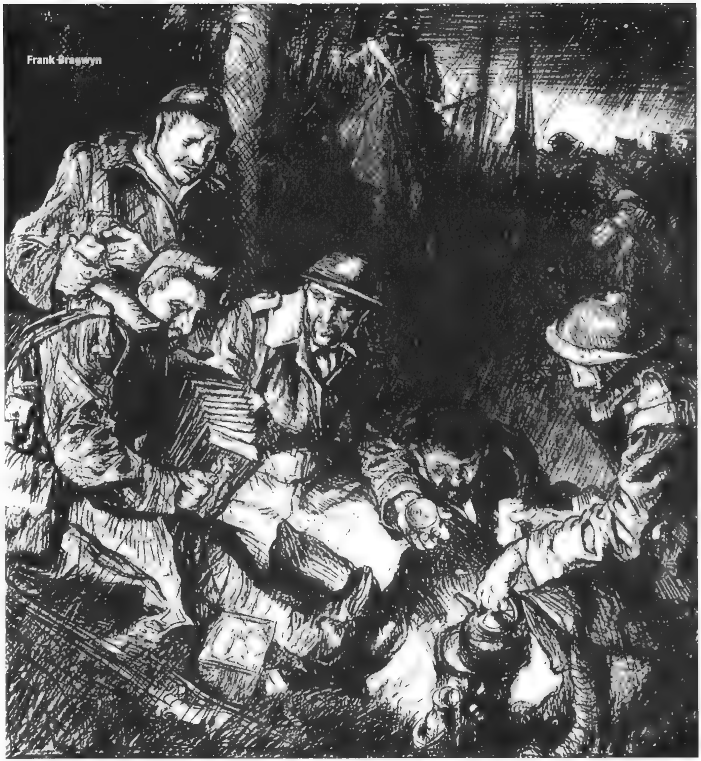
Being a publisher myself, I am sure this is



Joseph Clement Coll



Walter H. Everett



mostly a labor of love by Jim, as his production costs are high and his print runs are low, but he is deserving of our applause for preserving these rare and delicious images for future generations.

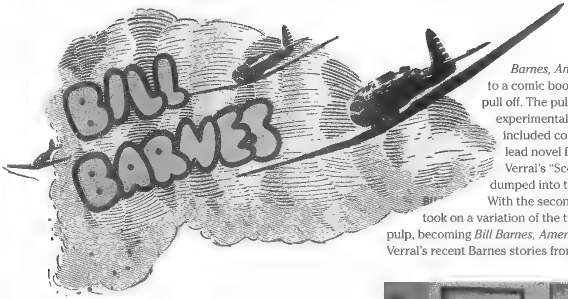
Issues 2-7 are available. Individual issues are $20 each. Purchase any three issues for $50 or all six for $95—priority mail postage is included in the price. Non-US prices are $60 for three or all six for $114—sent air mail, post paid. The first *Black and White ImageS Annual* is $23/$27 (non-U.S.) and the second is $26/$32. You can see every page of every issue at www.bpib.com/images.htm.

The magazine is on hiatus while Jim completes a book he's writing on Everett Raymond Kinstler. *ImageS* will return later this year and, we all hope, will continue indefinitely. The supply of source material is seemingly endless.

Call 650-493-3841 for more details or order from Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr. / 3809 Laguna Ave. / Palo Alto, CA 94306-2629. Please make checks payable to Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr.

CHARLES SPAIN VERRAL

by Will Murray

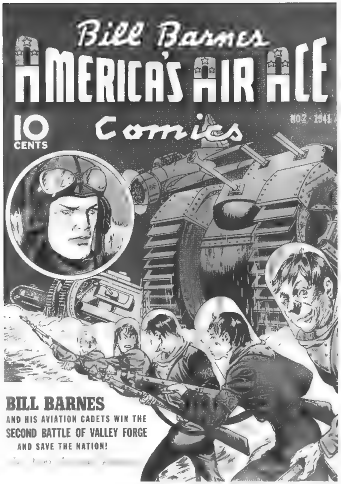


Fans of Charles Spain Verral know him and love him under another name, George L. Eaton. That was the house name attached to the Bill Barnes pulp novels he wrote for Street & Smith between 1934-1943. Bill Barnes was one of the great aviation heroes. There are still guys flying commercial aircraft who were inspired by Bill and his superplanes like the Scarlet Stormer and the Silver Lancer. In 1940, the character got its own comic book. Other than a very long Bill Barnes novelette called "Scourge of the Skies" in the first *Bill Barnes Comics*, Verral never wrote for it.

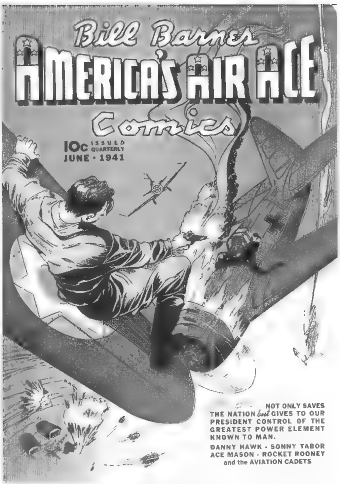
There's a funny story behind that. In the summer of 1940, Street & Smith announced an unusual new pulp magazine, *Bill Barnes, America's Ace*. The year before, Bill had been kicked out of his own magazine, *Air Trails*, which began catering to an older audience. He was stuck in the back of *Doc Savage*, where he was well received. Evidently, S&S decided to give Bill a pulp magazine of his own again. It was announced for a July release. Yet it never appeared. Instead, in October, they released the first *Bill Barnes Comics*.

Apparently, sales of the premier *Shadow* and *Doc Savage Comics* had come in, and were outselling their aging pulp line by a country mile. A decision was made to junk *Bill Barnes, America's Ace* and convert it to a comic book. It was probably easy to pull off. The pulp was to have been in an experimental format that was to have included comics as well. The planned lead novel for the pulp version, Verral's "Scourge of the Skies," was dumped into the comic book.

With the second issue, *Bill Barnes Comics* took on a variation of the title of the never-published pulp, becoming *Bill Barnes, America's Air Ace*. One of Verral's recent Barnes stories from *Doc Savage* was reprint-



Bill Barnes Comics #2 (Street & Smith, 1941).



Bill Barnes Comics #3 (Street & Smith, 1941).

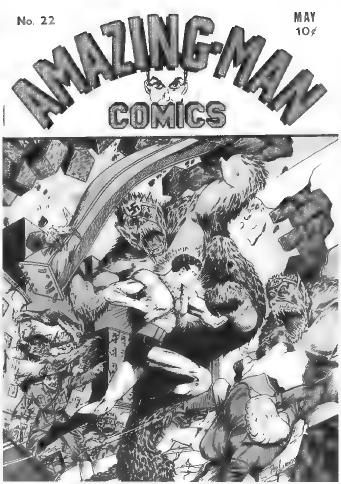
ed in lieu of another new prose adventure, leaving him an anonymous presence while others scripted his hero.

In that same year, plans were afoot for a Bill Barnes newspaper strip and radio program. Neither was ever released, but shortly after this, Frank Tinsley, the cover and interior artist for the Bill Barnes pulp launched an aviation strip called *Yankee Doodle*. It was very similar in concept to Bill Barnes, except that test pilot/inventor Yank flew an experimental plane called the Bat instead of the Charger—to name the specific superplane Barnes was flying in 1940.

I strongly suspect that when the Bill Barnes newspaper strip failed to fly, Tinsley simply salvaged it as *Yankee Doodle*, redrawing the planes, changing boy sidekick Sandy Sanders into a lad named Daniel Boone, and adding an embarrassing black foil named Captain Algernon Marmaduke Jeeps. Early on, Yank was an adventurer who battled the evil Black Column. After Pearl Harbor, the strip was renamed *Captain Yank* and Doodle joined the Marines, picking up a new set of leatherneck comrades who stopped flying the same month in 1945 the Bomb was dropped on Japan.

But Chuck Verral did move into comics beginning in January 1941, when he sold a fistful of scripts to Centaur, then being run by former pulp editor Harold Hersey. Verral's old *Bill Barnes* editor, F. Orlin Tremaine worked for Centaur and brought Verral into comics. George A. Weaver was listed as the official editor, but that may have been a house or pen

***Bill Barnes Comics* #11 (Street & Smith, 1943).**



***Amazing-Man Comics* #22 (Centaur, 1941).**

name for Tremaine or Hersey or both.

For *Amazing-Man Comics* #22 (May 1941) Verral did the following features: the Iron Skull, Minimidget, Mighty Man, the Voice and the Shark. In issue #23, he did the origin of A-Man's sidekick, Tommy the Amazing Kid, and the Marksman, Minimidget and Mighty Man. For #24, he penned Amazing-Man, Mighty Man, World's Strangest Girl, the King of Darkness, the Blue Lady and Nightshade.

Liberty Scouts #2 and #3 contain his work on the lead strip and Man of War, Vapo-Man, the Fire-Man and the Sentinel. For *Stars and Stripes* #3, Verral did eight features, ranging from Amazing-Man to obscure characters like the Black Panther, Reef Kincaid and the origin of Doctor Synthe—possibly the entire issue. He repeated the performance in issue #4, doing Amazing Man, Minimidget, The Shark, Iron Skull, Mighty Man and Doctor Synthe.

But it was a short-lived association. Verral landed the *Mandrake the Magician* radio series and quickly abandoned comics. (He had previously scripted pilot episodes to the 1940 Bill Barnes radio series that never went anywhere.) During this period, Verral wrote something his writing log calls *Mandrake and the Jungle Giant*, a Tastee Bread radio premium giveaway comic book not listed in Overstreet.

In 1942, Verral took over Drew Person's *Hap Hopper* newspaper strip, then drawn by Al Plastino, staying with it after it metamorphosed into *Barry Noble* during Jack Sparling's period. Scripting comics must have agreed with Verral, because he jumped back into comic books in 1944, writing Rocky Hill and Stubby for an unidentified magazine. He did Streaky Smith for *Calling All Boys* along with assorted issues of *Polly Pigtails*, *Sport Stars*, *Tex Granger* and *Jack Armstrong* for Parents Institute Magazines in 1947. His editor was Eliot Kaplan, Al Capp's brother.

After *Barry Noble* had run its course in May 1949, Verral began writing up a storm of scripts for a plethora of publishers. Still scripting for *Tex Granger*, he plunged into fulltime comics writing with a nine-page Captain Toostie story in September. This ended up in Toby Press' *Captain Tootsie & the Secret Legion* #1 or #2 a year later.

At first, Verral concentrated on work for Toby Press, which was run by Eliot Kaplan, his old Parents Institute Magazines editor. Verral's writing log records sales to *Billy the Kid*, *Jesse James* and *Peggy Dean*. Verral evidently got in on the ground floor of *Billy the Kid*, because he had stories in the first three issues, some apparently drawn by Al Williamson and Frank Frazetta. Frustratingly, where specific story titles are recorded, the magazine is not identified and vice versa.

Adventures Into the Unknown #4 (ACG, 1949).

Adventures Into the Unknown #22 (ACG, 1951).

Adventures Into the Unknown #24 (ACG, 1951).

For example, Verral penned eight different scripts circa 1950 for Toby's *John Wayne*. But he doesn't give titles. Maybe they didn't have any. The first three issues of Toby's *Billy the Kid* contain Verral stories, but the only one he identifies by title is "Haunted Cave." The first two issues of *Fighting Leathernecks* and *Monty Hall of the U.S. Marines*, also Toby titles, are full of Verral's work. He wrote the entire 32 pages of *Judy Joins the Waves*, a recruitment comic Toby produced for the U.S. Navy. The December 1947 *Jack Armstrong* carries his "Eager Beaver."

After a while, Verral branched out to other titles and publishing houses, including the American Comics Group.

For ACG, he sold stories to *Adventures Into the Unknown* and *Forbidden Worlds*, but the titles were often changed on publication. But some of them can be identified. *AITU* #14 showcased his "The Werewolf." Issues #22 and #24 contain such Verral yarns as "Voice of Death," "Fangs of Horror," "Witch's Wrath," "The Spectral Skate," and "Spectre in the Show Window." *Forbidden Worlds* #3 featured "Lair of the Vampire." Not tied to any one genre, Verral contributed to various issues of ACG's *Lovelorn*. He was one of the writers of Typhoon Tyler and the Time Travelers for *Operation Peril*.

It's frustrating to go through Verral's records and find such tantalizing entrees as "Arabian Nightmare" or "Madame Cobra," scripts he sold near the end of 1951, and have no clue to their print destination. There is also a reference to a script called "Captain Marvel and the Ice Kings," but it doesn't seem to have sold.

Verral's comic book career wound down, as so many did in the summer of 1952, when the comics field entered one of its frequent depressions. Some of his last work was a feature called "Lover O'Leary and his Liberty Belles" in *Tell it to the Marines*. He took an editing job with *Reader's Digest* book division, but still managed to pen the occasional commercial comic like *Forward with Eisenhower and Nixon* and *Turning Wheels—the Studebaker Story*.

Unlike a lot of pulp writers who turned to comics, Verral had a natural affinity for visual media. In his early career, he was an art director for the Clayton pulp magazine house. It was only by accident that he drifted into writing. When the Clayton chain went bankrupt in 1933, Street & Smith purchased several of Clayton's defunct titles in bankruptcy court, including two Verral worked on, *Clues* and *Air Adventurers*, which was reincarnated as *Bill Barnes, Air Adventurer*. Clayton editor F. Orlin Tremaine went over to Street & Smith with those titles, and Verral along with him.

Charles Spain Verral had another interesting comics connection. He was not the first guy to write the adventures of Bill Barnes. Tremaine brought him in when the original George L. Eaton was fired in 1934. That guy licked his wounds and went on to found an early comic book company you may have heard of.

His name was Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson.*

As for Chuck Verral, he may have left comics behind in 1952, but he went on to write children's books for Golden Books featuring The Lone Ranger, Zorro, Cheyenne and numerous other western TV heroes. Fortunately, they put his name on those—something that would make identifying his comics work a heck of a lot easier!

**A telling of the Major's story appears in* Comic Book Marketplace *#118.*

The Michael Naiman Report

by Michael Naiman

Grand Feasts

Happy New Year to you all. Hope that your collecting thirst will be slaked in the coming months. I made a trip in December to NYC—the best place to see during the holidays. Ate my way silly across the Bronx with New York's well known, 6 foot 4 inch, high-grade Silver Age DC collector who has been on every Sotheby's and Christie's grading committee. We stopped at our favorite *Good-Fellas-esque* restaurant, where there is no menu—you just order what you want. Everyone sits at a long table, elbow-to-elbow and the food is served family style. My buddy eats there every Monday night. How he keeps so thin is a miracle. An un-named San Diego DC war collector (who just had a new baby—Congrats, Mick!) has been banned from eating there because of his insistence on dousing Balsamic vinegar over everything he ordered. The waiters were aghast! BTW: no pizza is served here.

Being a third generation San Diegan, I had no concept of what "cold" can be. It was a bit chilly walking the mean streets of NY. It was below 30 degrees with a gusting wind! Brrrrrr. But, nothing like Frostbite Falls, Minnesota. And speaking of such, here's some recent sales:

Rocky and His Friends #1 (*Four Color* #1270) FN $20, #1 FN $33, #2 (*Four Color* #1275) FN+ $40, #2 FN $17; *Bullwinkle and Rocky* (Charlton) #1 FN+ $10 (55% of *Guide*); *Rocky and Bullwinkle Fun Kite Book* giveaway 1963 PG&E VG+ $65 (3.25X *Guide*), 1970 version $30 (1.43X *Guide*).

And now—for something completely different—Data East (1995) Rocky and Bullwinkle Pin-ball machine $1800, Bullwinkle Magnetic Crazy Maze Game produced by Standard Toycrafts 1962 in VF condition $106; Bullwinkle Ring Toss Game produced by Whitman 1972 original box unopened NM $30; Four (4) Bullwinkle and His Friends Stay-in-Tray inlaid plaque picture puzzles manufactured by P.A.T.-Ward Productions $35; Rocky and Bullwinkle watch and metal lunchbox made by Fossil, dated 1993. Outer box in VG shape, and all the paperwork, still has original watch battery but this needs to be replaced, also comes with a Bullwinkle pin $75; 1963 Rocky and Bullwinkle Telstar Thermos with two tiny dents, a few tiny dirt marks on it, and some rust on the bottom, glass is intact inside and comes with the original stopper (Red and Tan) and cup (Red) VG+ $68; Rocky and Bullwinkle Interactive Glass produced by Pizza Hut $35.

Thanks to research by noted comic book investigator Jon McClure, the variant-priced Marvel issues have been a vigorous hunt for a few hardcore collectors. Not to go unnoted is a Gladstone issue of *Uncle Scrooge* #219 that also has a variant! Known for being Don Rosa's first published Duck adventure "Son of the Sun," try and find the issue with Scrooge holding a green cane on the cover instead of a brown cane! No telling what this issue can bring! Get the combination to your Money Bin ready, the sky is the limit!

Yeah!Yeah!Yeah! Beatles *Yellow Submarine* (Gold Key 1968) FN with poster $102; *The Beatles Experience* published by Revolutionary Comics, 1991-92, #1-8 NM $30, each comic gives a chronological year-by-year description of important events in the lives of the members and the band itself, beginning with the year 1940 and ending in 1991 at the time of printing, highlighting important dates along with album releases and #1 hit songs, each comic is approximately 30 pages in length; *Summer Love* V2 #47 (Charlton) FN+ $16, features Beatles cover; *Teen Confessions* V1 #31 (Charlton) VG $20, featuring the Beatles in the issue and on the cover; *My Little Margie* (Charlton, Nov 1964) FN $20, Beatles cover; *Batman* #222 (Jun 1970) FN $21, Paul is Dead theme cover, the group's name and the band members names are changed, but the likenesses are the same as the Beatles.

Decca records *Tony Sheridan and the Beat Brothers* (Beatles) #31382, 7" 45 rpm, "My Bonnie"/"The Saints", $1,650, rare 45 rpm is a key piece of Beatles' history as it is their *first appearance on record* in the USA! This is an original pink label DJ copy, the labels, but for the date written in small letters on "My Bonnie" side, are pristine! The disk wax is in excellent condition with one light superficial scuff on the "My Bonnie" side and otherwise MT-. "The Saints" side has two light scuffs and is VG++. Both sides have lots of gloss! Stamped matrix reads: 45 DGG66833A and 45 DGG24673B.

The *Spectacular Spider-Man* #260, original art $3,800 by John Romita Sr, part of the three issue "Goblins at the Gate" storyline featuring the original Green Goblin and the Hobgoblin, this cover was penciled, inked and signed by Mr. Romita.

60 Minutes did a piece at the end of December 2004 on the latest generation to make its voice and buying power heard - the *Echo Generation*. The largest generation of young people since the '60s is beginning to come of age. They're the genetic offspring and demographic echo of their parents, the Baby Boomers.

Born between 1982 and 1995, there

HOT!

After selling all of the EC artwork for the "New Trend" comic books (1950-1955) and the "New Direction" comic books (1955-1960), and some of the "Pre-Trend" comics (pre-1950), RUSS COCHRAN'S COMIC ART AUCTION will now start selling the remainder of the "Pre-Trend" originals... titles like Picture Stories, Fat & Slat, Dandy, Tiny Tot, Moon Girl, Blackstone, etc., etc. Subscribe now, don't miss out!

Russ Cochran has been auctioning original comic art since 1973. RUSS COCHRAN'S COMIC ART AUCTION has offered the very best in comic strip art as well as comic book art.

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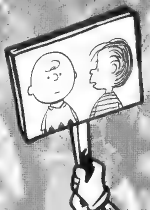

CBM Market Watch

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide) by Michael Naiman

Adventure
#99 VG $128 62%
#120 VG $82 88%
#210 GD $122 41%
#217 FN $110 Guide
#247 VG+ $530 74%
#262 VF/NM $37 26%
#265 VG $23 64%
#267 VG+ $84 48%
#311 FN $25 92%
#350 VF/NM $50 104%
#381 VF/NM $37 39%

Adventures into the Unknown
#10 FN $38 37%
#28 FN $30 42%
#110 FN $10 66%

Adventures of Bob Hope
#66 VF/NM $20 32%
#107 NM $35 41%

Adventures of Jerry Lewis
#55 GD $11 157%
#82 FN $9 60%
#97 FN $8 30%

Amazing Fantasy
#15 FN(R) "$1925" 49%

Amazing Spider-Man
#2 FN $560 62%
#2 VF $665 25%
#3 VF $668 36%
#4 VF $860 52%
#5 FN $355 75%
#7 VF- $405 48%
#7 VG+ $133 67%
#8 VF+ $473 56%
#8 VG- $91 46%
#10 GD $54 54%
#11 VG- $72 60%
#13 VG- $76 49%
#14 VG+ $77 22%
#15 VG $73 56%
#16 VG+ $77 71%
#17 VG $56 43%
#92 VF $20 38%
#93 VF/NM $20 27%
#94 VF+ $23 31%
#95 VF/NM $36 49%
#97 VF/NM $56 49%
#98 NM- $78 52%
#99 NM- $55 58%
#100 NM- $152 51%
#102 NM- $101 61%
#104 NM- $34 52%
#106 NM- $20 31%
#115 NM- $31 48%

Avengers
#1 GD $160 67%
#1 FN $780 107%
#1 VF "$1240" 59%
#2 FN $155 86%
#2 NM- $710 68%
#3 VF $150 31%
#4 VG $270 94%
#4 VF $590 49%
#9 FN $102 117%
#9 VF $155 74%
#15 NM $202 96%
#58 NM $103 121%

Capt. Marvel Adventures
#67 FN $71 84%
#77 GD $34 121%

Daredevil
#1 FN $440 72%
#1 VF $640 36%
#2 FN $154 95%
#3 VF $146 53%
#5 FN $140 172%
#8 NM- $205 98%

Donald Duck
FC 9 VG $550 37%
FC 29 GD+ $325 63%
FC 159 VG $103 72%
FC 178 GD+ $86 86%
FC 199 GD+ $30 45%
FC 223 GD+ $35 55%
FC 238 FN $100 72%
FC 256 VG+ $53 78%
FC 275 FN $75 80%
FC 318 FN $75 92%
FC 367 VG $31 62%

Fantastic Four
#1 VF NM (R) "$3050" 14%
#2 FN "$1,700" 187%
#2 VF- $925 37%
#3 FN $510 83%
#4 FN $885 129%
#6 VF $855 83%
#8 VF $260 38%
#9 VG $109 64%
#12 VF $711 59%
#35 VF $75 65%
#36 VF $75 65%
#43 VF $52 80%
#48 VF/NM $815 86%
#49 VF- $80 38%
#55 VF/NM $83 56%
#112 VF- $47 64%

Hulk
#4 FN $210 56%
#4 VF $380 38%
#181 NM- $811 64%

Iron Man
#1 VF- $100 36%
#1 VF/NM $245 59%

Journey into Mystery
#86 VG $79 81%
#113 NM- $86 49%
#114 VF/NM $153 84%
#115 VF $41 38%
#116 VF $40 50%

Marvel Mystery
#83 VG $166 90%
#84 VG+ $319 122%

Sensation
#61 VG $85 106%
#66 VG+ $135 168%

Strange Adventures
#2 VG $139 62%
#205 FN $37 102%
#213 VF/NM $42 62%

Tales of Suspense
#3 VG+ $100 96%
#14 VG $74 115%
#39 GD+ $540 152%
#49 FN $75 53%
#57 VF- $141 84%
#59 VF $210 Guide
#63 VF- $85 62%

Tales of the Unexpected
#26 VG+ $20 66%
#44 FN $103 137%
#57 VG- $10 33%
#68 FN $16 66%

Tales to Astonish
#27 GD+ $205 71%
#35 FN $205 49%
#35 VF $280 25%
#36 VF $130 25%
#52 VF- $100 106%

Uncle Scrooge
#1 (FC 386) VF/NM "$2111" 177%
#2 (FC 456) VF $500 115%
#6 FN $60 90%

X-Men
#2 GD $119 39%
#2 VF $355 27%
#3 FN $158 77%
#5 VF+ $208 54%
#6 NM- $565 71%
#10 VF/NM $147 39%
#15 VF/NM $144 42%
#17 VF/NM $115 63%
#97 VF/NM $46 43%
#98 VF/NM $35 35%
#102 NM- $39 52%
#105 NM- $44 59%
#108 VF $24 44%
#110 NM- $39 65%
#119 NM- $14 32%

are nearly 80 million of them. Whether you call them "Echo Boomers," "Generation Y" or "Millenials" they make up one-third of the current US population! The oldest are barely out of college and the youngest are still in grade school. As the population ages, they will become the next dominant generation of Americans.

According to Dr. Mel Levine, a professor at the University of North Carolina, and one of the best-known pediatricians in the country, this is a generation in which rules seem to have replaced rebellion, convention is winning out over individualism, and values are very traditional. Five out of ten Echo Boomers say they trust the government and virtually all of them trust Mom and Dad.

They are the most sophisticated generation ever when it comes to media. They create their own websites, and make their own CDs and DVDs. They're not watching traditional networks because they have so many choices.

Echo Boomers are the most watched

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over and controlled generation ever. Most have never ridden a bicycle without a helmet, ridden in a car without a seatbelt, or eaten in a cafeteria that serves peanut butter. They're hovered over by what are called "helicopter parents."

Dr. Levine noted that one trait that seems to run through this group is that they cannot think long-range. Everything has to be immediate—like a video game. Levine calls this phenomenon Visual Motor Ecstasy, where any cultural accoutrement that doesn't produce instant satisfaction is boring.

What this bodes for the future of the low-tech comic book remains to be seen. Will this Echo Generation have the patience to just sit and read? The last time I checked, comic books didn't have flashing lights, and they don't make nerve-grinding explosive sounds that would draw the attention of these stimulus-starved students.

If you observed last summers Comic-Con International: San Diego, you'd have seen most of this generation hanging around the latest movie set or video game booth, not around the Golden or Silver Age comic book areas. While this group spends $170 billion a year of their own and their parents' money, will they ever look to comic books and reflect nostalgically on their effect in their lives? Probably not. Their interests lie in video games, music and the Internet.

Publishers and retailers better figure out a way to lure these folk into the brick and mortar stores or this hobby will just turn into an avenue to license for movies and action figures. Every up-and-coming generation ignores the oldest living generation's nostalgia—that's just the nature of the beast. How do comic books fit into their lives today? And what is anyone doing about it?

CBM Market Reports

[Dr.] Scott McAdam
smcatoyguy@aol.com
972-463-7011
eBay userid: treasuresofyouth

Hi, Comic Fandom! Peace, Love and Harmony to those few of you still left in this dying HOBBY.

I underline and capitalize that word because it only describes why a very few of a dying breed still hang on to this love that we formed in our earlier years. Some of us younger and longer ago than others, but for me this is my thirtieth year in the field of comic books, which started a few weeks before turning 13 in 1975.

Within a few months of discovering comic books (and making a profit from them—OK I like to make money too) I worked at the flea market and soaked up all the knowledge I could get from my boss, the customers and friends that I made at the beginning of this life-long sojourn. Throughout my teens, while attending high school, I became obsessed with old comics, the history of old comics and whom it was that read those comics in the time of their birth [the comics, that is).

I spent the entire decade of the '80s working in the retail and wholesale aspect of comics; working for and running two different comic book stores and at the same time I worked for a wholesaler from 1981-85. All of this was in the San Francisco Bay Area.

During all this time I dealt in comics on my own, whenever I could find them and afford them away from my jobs, but I never lost the love for all types of comics. I learned how to identify certain artists by their specific styles, even when they did not sign their work, especially in 1950s Atlas comics (the best gathering of comic artists of all-time, yes including EC and Warren and any other publisher that spanned a full decade, more or less). I made many friends who were fans of the vintage comics: Golden and Silver Age, but mostly Silver.

Over the years I have seen so many, but the most dedicated collectors, leave the hobby for one reason or another. Girlfriends, wives, children being born, moving to other states, not enough money to afford any comics, not enough to afford more than new comics (a poor investment and not the thing that I would have chosen, especially since I do not read them), etc, etc. These and more have yielded more casualties than I care to consider in the long run of my collecting years. Of course, some of these were older men, when I was younger and have now passed on to that big, used book store in the sky and left their comics to some undeserving recipient of the historic morsels that they so wholeheartedly adored and sought after with a fervor that is just not present in the modern CGCer of today's market.

It seems that the days are gone when a collector, with a list, comes and

purchases comics at a show without picking at them with a fine-tooth comb for condition, rather than content, *which is why they were written and drawn*, if I am remembering correctly. Few and far between are debates about Lou Fine being better than Reed Crandall; showing that Kirby Thor fan, who says they hate Vinnie Colletta that gorgeous Atlas Romance that he did and helping him appreciate some of the fineries of this HOBBY (or kicking his butt out of your booth for being a A*%(&%(&); or showing that Silver Age collector some Matt Baker St. John art and watching his face light up and hearing him say "Wow, that guy was *awesome*."

Occasionally we still have the few simple pleasures in life like scoring a vintage collection from an ad that you place or getting a good old comic at an antique show from an unsuspecting victim (Like *A Moon, A Girl...Romance* #9 in VG for $2—$140 book value in November at a show).

Unfortunately, living in Texas produces fewer chances to sell good, vintage comics, than living in California did for me. That leaves eBay, which leaves very much to be desired in today's real world. Ebay has a tendency to utterly decimate a good deal, or what would have been a good deal back before the bottom feeding marketplace of the world's largest online auction site. Here is what I mean by that, I was at a local Dallas show and scored a nice little batch of semi-key Silver in mostly low grade for a good deal. The best book (and deal—value-wise) was a *Brave and Bold* #34 (1st Silver Age Hawkman for you Bronzers) in a solid G/VG for like $35. Now I think *Guide* is a little high on this book, but it is a good thing to quote in your description, although in this grade 2004 *Guide* is about $250-$275. So, since I got it for such a good deal I figure I will start it at a giveaway price of $99.99 (that's 40% of book [perceived value, of course] for those of you that are math challenged) with a Buy It Now of $175, hoping to grab that impatient auction-hater. *No go*, of course, so I list it again at $89.99 with a $125. *Yeah, right!* So my last desperate attempt to turn my $35 into a profit and save my own comic-dealer dignity and self-respect put it at $69.99 with $99.99 BIN. Oh, I forgot to mention that I used the sub-title line for an extra 50 cents each time, so where does that leave me now: with an extra $8.85 for the three listings in the stupid book and the thought that you can't give a decent book away on eBay to save your own freaking ass.

If you are still reading this, you are saying "So what, shut-up and quit whining" or "I wonder if my kids ate the last of that pizza from last night."

Well my point is (*finally*, I know) that unless you have a lot of money to buy really expensive comics that will always sell (*Spidey* or *FF* #1s, *ultra-high grade* G, S, or B) or can find people who are stupid enough to sell Gold, Silver or Bronze for dirt-ass cheap (which every other dealer under the sun seems to find or just plain rips people off on their comics) or just find something else to do to scrape out a living.

So, without ever losing my love of comics I went back to school four years ago (at age 38) and have only two semesters left for my degree and teaching credential to become a middle school mathematics teacher. Now you are saying, that doesn't pay diddly squat, but here in Texas (in the eastern D-FW Metroplex) I can start at about 40K (which is more than I make off comics after taking all the damn eBay fees and traveling expenses out of sales) and I will still have time to do one, maybe two shows a month around my area and possibly do some of the bigger shows during the summer and holidays.

I love this hobby and always will. They say that seven years of experience in a certain field equals a degree, and 12-13 equals a Masters, so I think 30 years makes me a Doctor of Comicology. I think the worst part of this whole thing is that when I was 13-18 and in love with the Golden Age, pre-Code (its own category at one time), Silver Age (1955-1965 in my estimation) I found older, more experienced and knowledgeable friends that mentored me and taught the love and respect of these slabs of paper that we hold so dear, but there are no more of those "mentees" that want to carry on the knowledge that we so fervently gathered from our predecessors. Will it die with us, because there are so few, even in their 20s now, that can, will, or even want to carry the torch that was passed on to us back in the '60s for some of you and the '70s for myself and my closest friends?

I want to thank Kerry Lawless, who paid me $5 a day in trade to learn from him; John Watson, who is still one of my bestest friends and the all-mighty Moe-din; Charles Abar, who owned the Bay Area wholesale business for years and taught me a lot about business and friendship; the late John Barrett, who I was never close to, but I looked up to him as the co-owner of Comics & Comix; Dick Swan, who is still one of the best guys in comics and probably the fairest comic dealer whom I have ever met; Ray Torrance, not a real comic guy, but still a man who taught me many principles that I still use in my dealings today; Michelle Nolan, who has been a good and loyal customer (to begin with) and a great and loved friend for many years (and a damn tough bargainer); and of course my best friend, Steve Wyatt, who I have known and been best friends with for most of that 30 years.

Thanks for all we have shared and all that each of you have taught me over the years. This sounds like some corny goodbye, but it is just a reminiscence of really good times. Here's to hoping that someone keeps the fire burning in the next generation and all those comic books that have kept so many generations entertained in the last 70+ years will entertain for centuries to come.

Al Stoltz
Basement Comics
Basmntcomx@aol.com

2004 At A Glance

What can I say after looking back at

the shows and online sales of 2004 but WOW! Again we exceeded sales from the year before and managed to have some great books pass through our hands so we could enjoy them at least for a moment.

Shows seemed to run hot and cold and alternate every other show as far as which one was a home run or just a double. Pittsburgh and Charlotte were our slowest outings for the year while San Diego and Baltimore may have been our best shows ever.

Ebay sales continue to climb and will perhaps make me a hermit who can just stay home and list online all day. The new E-Store that you can fill with loads of inventory for three cents seems to be working okay, at least it gets looked at instead of sitting in a box waiting for a show.

The CGC craze for slabbed and even unslabbed books is still jumping and growing. I have seen even what I consider *insane* money paid for books that in no way deserve to be at that level. The money paid for *Hulk* #181s and even *Ghost Rider* #1s is just crazy. I sit at many dinners during the show season and everyone still is speculating as to when a downturn will occur in this market. An adjustment will have to happen sooner or later as it does in any market. Comics are not the super untouchable money machine or else it would be *the* investment scene by all the world, not just the same guys I see at shows. For now, I am just happy to be riding the wave and making my extra cash per book.

For me, my highlight was buying a run of *Rockets Blast Comic Collectors* #1-20 from a long time dealer. Only four to five copies of #1 were ever made, and the chance of ever owning these is close to zero. Thanks, John Knight, for allowing me to purchase them.

And, as Mega Con starts the show season off for 2005, what new collections and sales await us and the market? Will write about it next time and let you know.

Terry's Comics
dba Nationwide Comics
PO Box 2065
Orange, CA 92859
Phone: 714-288-2993
Fax: 714-288-8992
E-mail: Westcoast: info@terryscomics.com
East coast: Davesamerican@earthlink.net
Web Site: www.terryscomics.com

First of all Happy New Year to all! 2004 was our best year ever, as the three main prophecies of doom and gloom that I have been hearing since I first started selling comics about ten years ago were again unrealized. Those three prophecies are as follows: 1) comics cannot possibly get any more expensive, 2) the vintage comic book hobby is over, and 3) there are no more great collections out there to be found.

Let me address those three prophecies:

#1 *Comics cannot possibly get any more expensive.* Simply put, they can and did. There is little or no evidence of resistance to pricing increases on choice material.

#2 *The vintage comic book hobby is over.* I have again seen no evidence whatsoever to support this. As I said before, our sales in 2004 were the best we have ever had. Collectors were lining up to buy vintage comics through the mail and at shows, and good material priced competitively always sold well.

#3 *There are no more great collections out there to be found.* Wrong again. We consistently found incredible original and secondary owner collections throughout 2004, so much so that at times I found myself having to turn leads over to other dealers. There just wasn't enough time to follow them all up (or space to store them in).

In my opinion, one of the main reasons for what I see as a continuing upward swing in our hobby is CGC. No matter what you might think of what they do, CGC is probably the one entity most responsible for giving the vintage comic book market a rejuvenating shot in the arm, and just when it was needed the most.

Don't think so? Then just try listing a nonCGC-graded Golden Age book on eBay, as opposed to a graded one. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. Thanks to Steve Borock, Mark Haspel, and the rest of the crew at CGC for a job well done. They have defined and raised the standards of our hobby and industry, making it safer and easier for newcomers and seasoned pros alike to spend the big bucks.

What's in store for 2005? Things are only going to get better, as we find ourselves more and more in the position of being thought of as archaeologists or caretakers of rare and valuable American artifacts, as opposed to hoarders of kid's throwaways.

John Hauser
PO Box 510673
New Berlin, WI 53151
262-789-1863
JMHCOMICS@aol.com

2004 was a pretty eventful year. The election seemed to slow mail order sales in the months prior and then even afterwards. The market seems to be recovering now and sales are picking up. Now is a great time to buy!

Recently I have been selling a lot of comics on consignment from friends and acquaintances. So far everyone seems to be happy with the sales and the state of the market. I will hope this continues into 2005. I've also started an eBay store and am finding that many items will sell outside of the auction format. This has been a relief as I had begun to think that collectors were getting hooked on the adrenaline surge that winning an auction can bring.

Ebay is continuing to grow and tons of great collectibles are available daily. Heritage continues to have auctions filled

with great items. Almost any old scarce comic seems to be available at a reasonable price. Eventually this supply will begin drying up and we will see prices begin to rise again.

Due to the large supply of comics available, sales on ordinary common comics in average grade are beginning to lag against the *Guide* prices. European sales continue to grow as overseas collectors discover how easy it is to collect in the modern computer age. Times have never been better for a collector.

The CGC market seems to be holding steady. Marvels are down slightly and sales on DCs are picking up as collectors realize how scarce this material really is. The new Batman movie is sure to be a hit. This will help the demand for DCs to rise in the coming months.

Recently I have been using nostomania.com for my pricing data on CGC and non-CGC sales. Their info seems to be very complete and as accurate as anything that I can find on the net. The price is right too!

The outlook for 2005 is bright. There have never been so many collectors and so many comics changing hands. The Internet is providing the collector community an easy, inexpensive place to assemble. It is hard to predict what the future has in store for us. If interest rates rise too quickly we might see some of the record prices being paid on comics begin to slow down. So if you have great material to sell, now might be a good time to break it out.

Greg Pharis

San Diego Comics and Collectibles
6968 El Cajon Blvd.
San Diego, CA 92115
619-698-1177

Hello, fellow fans! It's good to talk with you again. Let's start with what was hot in 2004. In the new issue market, it seems that sweeping changes in titles and heroes going bad dominated the scene. Marvel had their Avengers Disassembled series. This storyline also sparked interest and sales in Silver Age *Avengers* (especially #s 4-25). At the same time DC was putting out Identity Crisis. This sparked interest in the original Crisis series from 1985, as well as the JLA/JSA team-ups in the silver age era *JLAs*. DC promises more "Crisis" happenings in 2005. Teen Titans has returned stronger than ever and back issues of all incarnations have felt the benefit.

The *Superman/Batman* title (currently at 16 issues) has certainly been hot. This has created interest in *World's Finest* back issues. The same holds true for the *Green Lantern: Rebirth* mini-series. Bringing back Hal Jordan is charging-up fans to seek out *GL* back-issues. This trend seems to be steady (hot new storylines leading to increased back issue sales), with one exception. The new Jim Lee *Superman* is selling, well, super. But there has been little interest in *Superman* back issues at the moment. Marvel's *Astonishing X-Men* title has been on fire, and *X-Men* back-issues sell well all the time. Lastly it's nice to report that a non-Marvel title has been going nova. That is Image's *The Walking Dead*. I mean Zombies have taken over the Earth.

It is great reading and I liken it to the *Tomb of Dracula* in the Bronze Age. One would think that only so much could be done with a horror title and still remain exciting and interesting issue after issue. But *The Walking Dead* is doing just that.

Where is this industry going in 2005? I predict an increase in the sales and interest of back issues for two reasons. One is that the new comics that are coming out seem to be getting better both in story and art. As I've noted, this bodes well for the sale of back issues. Fans want to know what happened before and this is a good thing. The second reason is a little more dubious. I think the cost of new issues needs to stabilize. Most of the issues cost around $3 each now, and an increasing number of consumers are opting to spend their $3 on older issues. If the new comics prices keep going up more fans will buy back issues. This will certainly affect the balance. I think all true comic shops want balance. We need the new issues to sell the back issues and visa versa. That's how the industry works. At least it has for me in the last 32 years. So publishers, I plead with you to hold the line on cover prices. Or, if you have to increase the cost, make it out of necessity, not greed. Let's have a great and fun 2005 and continue to buy both new comics and back issues.

Greg White

Comic Books and Collectibles
PO Box 45-0003
Kissimmee, FL 34745
407-870-0400
WEMISSWALT@aol.com

My column relates strictly to pre-1975 product. 2004 continued to be the year of hype in regard to vintage comic book sales. Virtually all the print ads and articles written on the hobby promoted the slabbing mentality. I truly believe that less than 20% of the comic book public has been duped into believing that slabbing is the way to go. The remaining 80% of us simply continue to build our collections, enjoy our vintage comic books (*yes, we even have the audacity to read the issues!)* and hopefully meet the few remaining oldsters from the Golden Age/Silver Age period.

Comic books should be read, discussed, enjoyed and then re-read. Difficult to do if the book is trapped within some silly piece of plastic. However, as long as the expensive hype and stupidity continue I am afraid that we will have to deal with the slabbing foolishness.

The other big story of 2004, although we have dealt with this for a handful of years, continues to be the shift to Internet purchases. Each year more collectors purchase their books on eBay and other related sites. This continues to cause a negative impact for those of us who prefer to sell "over the counter" at our stores or conventions. Fewer comic

collectors attend comic book conventions (please don't quote me attendance figures from San Diego or Wizard World—most of the people through the door wouldn't know a Silver Age comic book if it hit them in the face!) and even fewer purchase books at their local comic book shops. The Internet is here to stay, we all have to learn to deal with that fact; however you would have to be blind not to see the negative impact it has had on in-store sales.

Pre-1975 artwork continued to be priced at silly levels that 90% of the collecting public could not dream of affording. There were some terrific pieces offered for sale during the year but only a handful of collectors could hope to afford them. When so few drive the art market prices it makes it more difficult for the rest of the collecting public to keep pace. In many cases when a collector is hopelessly priced out of a market he may lose interest and move on to another field. That never bodes well for the future of our hobby. Of course there were many positive stories during the year regarding new collection finds, recently unearthed information about vintage product and the usual heart warming stories of how many true collectors still act in a manner that restores some hope for the future.

Like many other collectors, I continue to add comics and art to my collection, I read the books and hang each piece of art on the wall, and in general still enjoy the hobby that has provided me with untold hours of enjoyment. Many of us simply choose to look beyond the sour "investment" attitude that permeates today's hobby. Of course we also hope for a return to sanity at some point in the future. 2005 will probably be a mixed bag. The slabbing hype will certainly continue, and weak-minded individuals will continue to feel that it is "the only way to go." New collections will pop up.

Sadly we will continue to lose the pioneer writers and artists who made this hobby great in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. I believe most pre-1970 artwork that features popular characters or artists will continue to be overpriced. The leveling out of the prices will come someday but not in the near future. 2005 will bring the occasional good comic book convention, however most of the shows will continue to be media events that stress new and recent product (much of which has little to do with comic books). I am certain that long time collectors like myself will continue to attain nice pieces that fall through the auction cracks and allow us that magical moment once again of adding a key piece to our vast collections. I welcome 2005 and look forward to buying, selling, trading and talking about my favorite hobby—vintage comic books. Let the investor/speculators do as they will—my enjoyment for my lifelong hobby will not be diminished. Happy New Year!

Michael Tierney
Collector's Edition
3217 John F. Kennedy Blvd.
North Little Rock, AR 72116
501-791-4222
The Comic Book Store
9307 Treasure Hill
Little Rock, AR 72227
501-227-9777

Even with 2005 having just begun, it's easy for me to predict that this new year will be better than the last. 2004 was a big disappointment for my market. It started with hope, as a number of comics related movies hit the theaters and achieved a strong measure of box office success. But like the *Classics Illustrated* of decades past were often used in lieu of reading the book, perhaps now a lot of people choose to watch the movie instead of reading the comic book. The success of comics movies in the competing entertainment industry of movies didn't translate into success for me in 2004.

It hasn't always been that way. Back in 1989, the *Batman* movie phenomenon sent hordes of new readers into my stores. In contrast, the more recent *Spawn* and *Hulk* movies seemed to have hurt sales for their respective comics counterparts.

One group of potentially new readers that did come into my stores after the theatric success of *Spider-Man 2* left largely empty-handed. I had a number of parents come in to buy comics for their children who subsequently were turned away by the PSR content warning codes on practically every Marvel comic at the time. It was a huge missed opportunity. The good news that came out of this was that Marvel seemed to realize their error.

In the latter part of 2004 Marvel unveiled the Marvel Age line of All-Ages comics. This line addressed a segment of readers that Marvel had largely ignored for over a decade. Anyone who's been in the industry long enough knows that our future depends on always developing the next generation of comics readers. Depending on which census report you look at, there are between 60 and 90 million U.S. citizens at college age and younger. That's a huge potential market. Manga has enjoyed success tapping into that market by also using a system that incorporates suggested age guidelines.

So—while Marvel's shelf performance plummeted at my stores in the last quarter of the year, the Marvel Age line was a climber. This last Christmas saw a number of adults coming in to buy comics for children. More than I'd seen in quite some time. I think that the increased selection, combined with the overall increased profile of comics as a whole, combined to create this demand. It was a welcome sales surge in a bad Christmas season.

You always hear the songs about "dreaming of a white Christmas." What they don't sing about is the cost. For my stores, a sleet and snow storm that rolled in at noon on Wednesday was followed by a freeze that kept the streets icy through Saturday, and effectively canceled Christmas. I opened the stores, but no one ventured onto the streets in a state unaccustomed to dealing with snow. The highway department seems to operate under the plan, "The sun will come out eventually and melt it." This happens on a cycle of about every four

years, and while I've often lost a day or two before Christmas, never the rest of the week. The following week had strong sales, but with revenues for one week having to compensate for two, this was by far the worst Christmas season of sales versus expectations that I've seen in twenty-two years.

2004 will also be remembered for the defeat of Arkansas Display Act 858. This crazy law would have made it illegal to display any book that someone might complain that they considered it "harmful to children." This law would have prevented children from entering not just bookstores, but libraries as well. It was a vague law that left interpretation open from county to county and city to city. When I was debating this law on the local news, one legislator touted how he thought it was a good idea that "What is considered obscene in Little Rock might not be considered obscene in Jonesboro." Thankfully, the law was opposed by many organizations, including the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, and subsequently declared unconstitutional by the courts. While this was a welcome defeat, it's not necessarily the end of Act 858. When the Arkansas Legislature reconvenes in January of 2005, they will have the option to either let the law die quietly, or try to rewrite the language. I'm hoping that the latter doesn't happen. Otherwise, it could signal act two of Act 858.

Also in 2004, DC became firmly entrenched as my #1 selling publisher. DC enjoyed strong sales on their Identity Crisis series, and the early issues of *Green Lantern: Rebirth*. Much of this success was thanks to their aggressive reprint policy that kept hot books in the hands of hungry readers. DC also further addressed their All-Ages lines, with the Jonny DC logo becoming part of a uniform package. Unfortunately, nowhere were the words 'All-Ages' apparent, and most parents would pass them over unless we hand sold them.

There wasn't a lot of noise last year from the independent publishers. Dark Horse's new *Conan* comics galloped strongly out of the gate, thanks in part to the 25 cent promotional preview. Cartoon Books published the finale to the long-running *Bone*, which had lower than expected sales, mainly due to lateness. However, the gigantic *Bone* collection containing the entire series sold very well, despite a nearly $40 price point. I even had customers purchasing multiple copies. Next year, these same *Bone* comics will return in color for the first time.

And no retro view of the year would be complete without mentioning the conclusion of the long-running *Cerebus* series. Begun in 1977, this 300-issue miniseries came to a conclusion. After highs achieved in the early Eighties, sales dropped over the years, but have risen again with the follow-up retrospective series, *Following Cerebus*.

I'm not sure if any new Independent titles will replace the loss of *Cerebus* and *Bone*. While Marvel and DC will no doubt continue to focus primarily on super-heroes, it is the independent press where the variety in comics comes from. Like movies and television, the comics media is a great format for telling any kind of story, be it mystery, horror, war, suspense, historical or adventure. Who knows, maybe someday romance comics will make a comeback and tap into the market of young girls currently reading Manga.

I hope other avenues of storytelling will continue to be explored, and the premiere publishers continue to make comics for every age of reader, both young and old.

Key Sales were kind of thin in December: *Amazing Spider-Man* #4 (Origin/1st Sandman) VG $170, #195 (1st app. Black Cat) VF $15; *Fantastic Four* #112 (Hulk vs. Thing) VF $65; *Marvel Team-Up* #1 VG+ $20; *Star Trek* (Gold Key) #3 VG+ $38, #6 VG- $21.

Opinions expressed in CBM *"Market Reports" are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Prices vary by location, date of transaction and other factors.*

COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE

BACK ISSUE DEPARTMENT

These issues are available...

#65	Pre-Code Crime, Bob Kane	$8
#72	Iron Man & Subby, Larry Lieber Part I	$8
#79	Blue Beetle, Fred Guardineer, Captain Action	$8
#83	Magnus, Saturn Girl, Plastic Man	$8
#84	Morrow, Ditko, Romita Sr., Brainiac	$8
#85	Eisner, Manning, Whitman Mystery Part I	$8
#86	Perez Part I, Bronze Age, Whitman Mystery Part II	$8
#87	George Evans, Detectives Inc.	$8
#88	Murphy Anderson, Rudolph	$8
#89	Hal Foster, Frank Cho, George Perez Part II	$8
#90	Patriotic issue, Bob Lubbers, George Perez Part III	$8
#91	Johnny Craig, Harry "A" Chesler	$8
#92	Joe Kubert, Eddie Stanky, Mary Worth	$8
#93	Alex Raymond, Flash Gordon, Gail Simone	$8
#94	GA Green Lantern, Spectre, Perez Wrap-up	$8
#95	Disney strip art, Miracleman	$8
#96	Milton Caniff, Marc Hempel	$8
Sp #5	Spider-Man, Gerber Sticker Set #8	$12
#97	Curt Swan, T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents	$8
#98	Western: Dick Ayers, Graham Ingels, John Severin	$8
#99	Marvel 1965, Iron Man, Hulk, Transformers	$8
#100	Charles Schulz, H. J. Ward, Pulp Roots of Batman	$8
#101	Archie, Butch Guice, CrossGen	$8
#102	Lev Gleason, Russ Heath, Commercial Comics Co.	$8
#103	Disney Comics, Jack Bradbury, Don Rosa	$8
#104	Batman, Neal Adams, Loeb & Lee, Lew Schwartz	$9
#105	Wrightson, Kaluta, Jeffrey Jones, Bruce Jones	$9
#106	Good Girl Art, Rima, Cat Girl, John Celardo	$9
#107	Victor Fox, Aquaman's Paul Norris	$9
#108	End of DC's SA, Geo. Carlson, GA Black Market	$9
#109	GA Villains, Neal Adams Pt. 2, Infantino	$9
#110	Ross, Saunders, Kirby, Wildey, Snyder III	$9
#111	SA Villains, Paul Gulacy, Jim Starlin	$9
#112	Atlas Horror, Alan Class Comics	$9
#113	Nedor, Geo. Pratt, Milt Story, Flying Saucers	$9
#114	Dark Horse Horror, , DC Horror, Robert Tinnell	$9
#115	Barks, Rosa, Eisner, Feldstein, Stanley	$9
#116	How Jews Created Comics Pt. I	$9
#117	How Jews Pt. II, Kanigher, O'Neil	$9
#118	How Jews Pt. III, American Flagg	$9

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CBM BACK ISSUES
GEMSTONE PUBLISHING
PO BOX 469
WEST PLAINS, MO 65775-0469

by Michelle Nolan

This Month it's 1947

There's no question what the most collectible comic book was to come out of that wonderful year 1947. There's also no doubt what the most commercially important title was—and they provided quite a contrast on the stands at the time.

The first issue of Fox's infamous *Phantom Lady* series, issued with #13 in the indicia and dated August 1947, could be sold dozens of times at any major comic convention, particularly in either very high or low grades, if that many issues were available.

But if you want to talk genuine history, *Phantom Lady* doesn't even come close, even though that title played a role in the establishment of comic book self-censorship in 1955, six years after

the Fox series ended. Instead, the historic honors must go to Crestwood's *Young Romance* #1 (Sep-Oct)—the first authentic romance comic book.

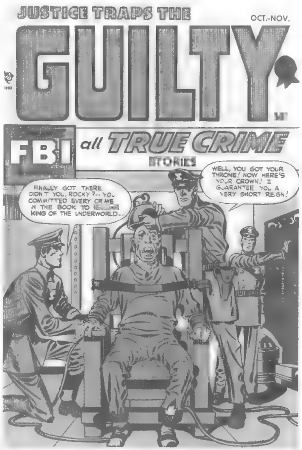
But, you might be asking, what about the first horror title—Avon's 1947 *Eerie* one-shot? Not even close, historically speaking. In fact, that poorly written comic book—albeit with stories illustrated by Joe Kubert and Bob Fujitani—was dated January and thus appeared in 1946, almost two years before the first issue of *Adventures Into the Unknown* (Fall 1948). Yet *AITU* was the first regularly published horror comic and was far more influential in horror history than *Eerie*. In reality, the 1947 *Eerie* probably wasn't even seen by most publishing contemporaries of Avon, a paperback and pulp publisher which began producing comics not long before printing that obscure issue of *Eerie*.

In fact, horror was hard to find anywhere in 1947. The first cycle of Hollywood horror ended in 1946—virtually no horror movies were released in 1947—and almost all of the horror pulps were long gone as well, even though some detective pulps tried to pick up on the theme. Even the long-established *Weird Tales* was a struggling bimonthly by that time.

Love, though, was everywhere—in the movies, on the radio soap operas, in numerous true-confession and movie star magazines, and in plenty of pulp and paperback titles.

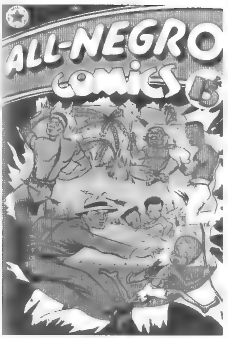
And, finally, in the comic books, thanks to the imagination of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, who did historically significant work in so many genres. *Young Romance* followed shortly after their short-lived work for Hillman on *My Date*, a sophisticated teen humor title that lasted only four issues in 1947-48. Marvel and Fox soon followed in 1948 with their first romance comics, and by 1949 more than 120 romance titles had hit the stands in the greatest knockoff party since super heroes first became popular a decade earlier.

Historically minded collectors have



sought that first issue of *Young Romance* for years, yet it still lists for only $46 in "good" condition in the *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*. But issues of *Phantom Lady* go for seven or eight times that—at a minimum—and a great many other 1947 issues are valued much more than *Young Romance*, including that weak *Eerie* one-shot.

With the end of paper rationing, comic book publishers produced 1,616 issues in that wonderful year 1947 (give or take a couple that may not exist)—a record at the time but a mark destined to last only one year. The comic book market was still heavy in super heroes and was not yet nearly as diverse as it was to become during the next few years,



though the sheer number of publishers guaranteed plenty of diverse work for creators.

National Comics (DC) was still very much king of the publishers—DC's 211 issues represented about 25 percent more than Dell and Fawcett, with 157 issues apiece as listed in comics historian Dan Stevenson's issue-by-issue database. Even though those three publishers produced nearly one-third of all newsstand comics, it wasn't hard to find other comic book styles. Led by No. 4 publisher Marvel's 128 issues, no fewer than 27 smaller companies produced at least 10 issues that year.

DC, though, published the majority of the most intriguing comics of 1947. The most sought-after DC issue is probably *Flash Comics* #86 (Aug), with the debut of Black Canary in the Johnny Thunder story. Black Canary—never more than a backup strip but popular enough among collectors to merit a recent DC Archive edition—was among the last costume heroes created in the Golden Age.

One of DC's best Golden Age villainesses, The Harlequin, made her debut as a foil for Green Lantern in *All-American* #89 (Sep). Other DC issues of note in 1947 were the company's first crime comic, *Gangbusters* #1 (Dec 1947/Jan 1948); its first female teen humor star, *A Date with Judy* #1 (Oct-Nov); and the last issue of *More Fun Comics* with #127 (Nov-Dec), following an unsuccessful 20-issue conversion to a humor title. In addition, DC began giving Robin the Boy Wonder starring roles, usually sans Batman, in *Star Spangled Comics* with #65 (Feb).

DC also provided one of the Golden Age's biggest mysteries in 1947 when *All-Flash* became the company's first single-character comic book to be cancelled. The last issue was #32 (Dec 1947-Jan 1948). Even though DC earlier converted two heroic titles to humor titles—*Leading* and *More Fun*—it still seems odd that DC abandoned The Flash's solo title, especially since the character continued in the two anthology titles *Flash Comics* and *Comic Cavalcade*, along with playing key roles with the Justice Society in *All Star Comics*.

Two other long-running titles got their start in 1947—*Blondie* from McKay (later Harvey) and *Justice Traps the Guilty* from Crestwood. Both represented the trend toward humor and crime.

Meanwhile, Harvey's onetime heroic best-seller *Speed Comics* was cancelled with #44 (Jan-Feb)—one of the first of the classic Golden Age anthologies to be discontinued. Likewise, Mary Marvel bowed out of *Wow Comics* after #59 (Oct), though she continued in her own title for another year and starred with The Marvel Family until Fawcett went out of business with issues dated January 1954.

The curiosity piece of 1947 was *All Negro Comics*, starring(?) an abysmally drawn and written strip called Ace Harlem. Can anyone provide details of how this relic came to be? I've always wondered about its history. Unlike other Negro titles of the period—such as *Negro Heroes* (Parents Magazine) and *Negro Romance* (Fawcett)—*All Negro Comics* was the one and only issue to emerge from its publisher. With a *Guide* value of $667 in "good," this rarity might be the most over-rated comic book in history. I'm not sure I agree with its Gerber *Photo-Journal* scarcity rating of 9 (fewer than 10 copies exist), but there's no question *All Negro Comics* is rare.

Getting back to where we came in, with *Phantom Lady*, it's intriguing to note that this Fox display of skin and sensationalism was one of only three titles cover-pictured in Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954, with the infamous bondage cover for #17 (Apr 1948). A far more demure *Phantom Lady* returned briefly in 1954-55 under the Ajax banner—well after Wertham's book appeared, it should be noted—but the original *Phantom Lady* vanished in 1949.

As was the case in nearly every other illustrated example in Wertham's screed, the offending character or title had long since been abandoned by 1954. But that didn't stop some misinformed adults from fearing that *Phantom Lady* types still tied up the newsstands, in much the way they did in that wonderful year 1947.

Book Review

by Paul Gravett

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COMICS CREATORS ON SPIDER-MAN
Tom DeFalco
(Titan Books) $16.95
ISBN 1-84023-422-9

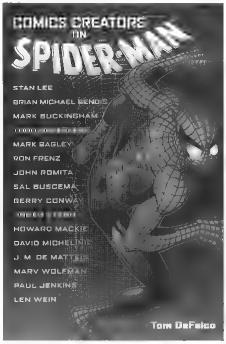
This book is perfectly timed to reach the broader public now discovering, or rediscovering, The Amazing Spider-Man via his latest incarnation in two hugely successful Hollywood blockbusters. As a lifelong Spidey-fan since about the age of 11 or 12 and a former Marvel writer and editor who has worked on the Spidey line and currently on *Spider-Girl*, author Tom DeFalco is eminently qualified to take us through the forty years of this unfolding saga by interviewing some of the principal writers and artists behind it in this 256-page black-and-white paperback.

Fittingly, DeFalco begins by talking with Stan Lee about the character's modest beginnings in the fifteenth and final issue of *Amazing Fantasy* in 1963, as the title was apparently about to be cancelled. DeFalco then goes on to question fifteen of the significant creators closely involved, from Lee's second Silver Age master artist John Romita, through his Bronze Age successors Gerry Conway, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman and Sal Buscema, to major players in the Eighties and Nineties like Roger Stern, Ron Frenz, David Michelinie, Todd McFarlane, J.M. DeMatteis and to the most recent reinventors Mark Bagley, Howard Mackie, Paul Jenkins, Mark Buckingham and Brian Michael Bendis. Not that Lee has given up producing 'Ol' Webhead'; it's easy to forget but Lee still writes the *Spider-Man* newspaper strip to this day.

Each of these interviews is lively and revealing, and is supplemented with a photo and mini-profile of the creator, informative sidebars on key characters and issues, a checklist of their contributions, and, most interesting of all, a number of behind-the-scenes pages of scripts, sketches and layouts. The design is crisp and clear, but I was slightly disappointed that there were no pencil drawings by McFarlane or Bagley, nor sample scripts by Conway, DeMatteis, Mackie or Bendis; instead we get some full page reproductions of key covers in black and white, but these are not nearly as interesting. I would also have welcomed an index to make it more user-friendly.

A number of landmarks in Spidey's life are discussed at length in this book. Probably not since the death of his Uncle Ben had Peter Parker felt such a "great responsibility" as that following the death of Gwen Stacy. Gerry Conway was still a teenager when he started writing comics and was less than a year into his run on Spider-Man when he unleashed perhaps the most devastating event in Marvel's Bronze Age history to shake things up. Conway suggests that at some point in the Sixties, "Stan started to let up on Peter Parker" and that "Ditko obviously liked to torture his characters. John Romita...is a lovable guy, and didn't want to hurt Peter." Under Conway, the series returned to the emotional rollercoaster of the first thirty-plus issues. In Conway's view, his historic two-parter "introduced fatalism and despair into the comics universe." The complicity of Spider-Man in Gwen's death as he tries to save her was a defining personal tragedy and piled a further weighty burden of guilt on his shoulders. The moment is still hotly debated, and DeFalco quizzes Conway on his intentions, especially that terrible "SNAP!" sound effect as the falling Gwen is caught. Far from being calculated, Conway insists this addition was a decision of his subconscious mind. "The fact that I don't know if Gwen was alive, and you don't know, is meaningful, because that's when a piece of art really lives—when a story means different things to different people on different levels."

Other memorable milestones are also considered, from Conway's moving storyline about Joe Robertson standing up to his school bully, now grown up as gangster Tombstone, to DeMatteis' riveting finale to a supervillain, "Kraven's Last Hunt"; from Peter's graduation and wedding, the alien costume, even a nostalgic nod to the Spider-Mobile. It's also intriguing to read about the resistance, on DeFalco's part for one, to the Clone Saga, and the huge excitement this big idea soon generated among the team of writers, as they began to imagine its potential, even



if much of it was never fully realized. Looking back, this increasingly complex and controversial twist to the Spider-Man legend divides opinions still.

DeFalco mentions in his introduction that several Spidey creators had to be omitted for various reasons, among them the most recent creative team of J. Michael Straczynski and John Romita Jr. It seems Straczynski was too busy to commit, which is a pity as he is continuing to inject fresh imagination into the book. Fortunately Romita Jr has

[continued on page 80]

CD Review

by Will Murray

MASKED MARVELS
Compiled by Anthony Tollin
(www.radiospirits.com)
$39.98 Compact Disk set
$34.98 cassette tape set
ISBN # 1 57019-714-8

Maybe it's true that history repeats itself. Fifty years ago, after only a generation of popularity, radio drama and comedy began disappearing from the AM airwaves, a victim of that new electronic monster, television. Of course, Old-Time Radio didn't die. It just went to sleep for a little while.

Simultaneously, the original multi-record phonograph albums were being phased out in favor of a long-playing 33 and 1/3rd RPM vinyl record. Originally called albums because they came packaged in hard binders, with each 78 RPM disk in its own paper sleeve. Even through successive packaging changes from vinyl to cassette, and finally to compact disk, the term album was carried over out of habit.

I was again reminded of how "the more things change, the more they stay the same" when I got my review copy of Radio Spirits' new CD compilation, *Masked Marvels*, the latest in their Legends of Radio series.

Popping open the attractive plastic case, I found 10 compact disks in neat plastic sleeves, 25 episodes total. It was as if the old-time 78 record album had never gone the way of reel-to-reel recording, merely found a better package. As someone who owns hundreds of vintage radio shows on cassette tape, I thought: Now this is the way to go. (A cassette tape edition is also available.)

Radio Spirits has been releasing these handsome collections for several years now, but this time they may have outdone themselves. Taking as the theme the heroic Masked Marvels of Old-Time Radio, compiler and OTR expert Anthony Tollin has assembled a unique collection of radio's most famous super-heroes, seasoned with some obscure masked mysterymen, of the Golden Age. Everyone knows The Shadow and the Lone Ranger, but rarer heroes like El Diablo and the Green Lama add the novelty of new discoveries to this traditional radio roster.

Masked Marvels starts off with three choice episodes of *The Shadow*, "Sabotage" starring the notorious Orson Welles, and two Bill Johnstone episodes from the early '40s before the show fell into the familiar formulaic rut ruled by the Lamont Cranston people seem to remember most fondly, Bret Morrison. Although I'm personally partial to the Welles episodes, where The Shadow's occult powers are emphasized, Tollin has unearthed a real curiosity called "The Laughing Corpse." Aired a mere month before The Joker first surfaced to plagued Batman, this creepy classic foreshadows the Clown Prince of Crime's infamous modus operandi.

"The Adventures of the Scarlet Cloak" is a rare pilot for an unsold show in the Zorro tradition. When hero Brad Carver (Wendell Niles) returns to 1840s California, he discovers his murdered father was really a legendary masked champion of the oppressed. Taking up the family scarlet cloak and sword, Carver becomes the latest incarnation of El Diablo. This was a novel concept for 1950, and plays surprisingly modern, as if created today. Of interest are the "commercials" telling prospective sponsors this show could be configured for both radio and TV broadcast—a common practice in the waning days of radio drama.

The Green Lama was a 1940s pulp hero in the dark mold of The Shadow. After wealthy Jethro Dumont (played by veteran voice actor Paul Frees) returns from mystical Tibet, he adopts the emerald robes of the Green Lama to fight crime. Creator Ken Crossen made his weird hero more of a success in comic books than he ever was in the pulps, but few remember that the Green Lama had an 11-episode radio run in the summer of 1949. For this collection, the very first episode, ripped right out of the pulps, is offered, backed up by a later one from this obscure but wonderful series. Surviving radio origin episodes are uncommon, and "The Man Who Never Existed" sets up the remainder of the run, providing everything you need to know to enjoy the follow-up episode, "The Million Dollar Chopsticks."

People who remember *The Lone Ranger* only for its stirring 30-minute episodes might turn up the volume for one of the great Lone Ranger serials of the Brace Beemer era. In 1942's "Heading North," the Masked Rider of the Plains rides up to the unfamiliar terrain of the Montana-Canadian border, where he first encounters Dan Reid, the orphaned son of the Masked Man's murdered brother, and battles a Lone Ranger impersonator. An exciting new version of his origin—first revealed only the year previous—is recounted in the last episode, "A Nephew is Found." After this, Dan Reid became a regular member of the Lone Ranger cast, supplementing Tonto.

This serial segues directly into the final two parts of the recently-discovered three-parter where the grown-up Dan Reid finally learns that his son Britt is secretly the Lone Ranger's modern-day successor, the Green Hornet. (Part 1 was omitted due to inferior sound quality, but "Graft Crosses a Bridge" and "Too Hot to Handle" are really the important ones.)

Taken together, these Lone Ranger-Green Hornet sequences are truly historic. While most people by now know that the Green Hornet was the Lone Ranger's nephew, the skeins that tied these two classic heroes together were first woven in these two long-lost serials.

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Will Eisner 1917-2005

Cartoonist/graphic novelist Will Eisner died Monday, January 3, 2005, in Florida following quadruple heart bypass surgery. He was 87.

Will Eisner is recognized internationally as one of the giants in the field of sequential art, a term he coined. His career spanned nearly seventy years and eight decades, beginning with contributions to Wow, What a Magazine while still a teenager in 1936, followed by the start of his buccaneer saga Hawks of the Seas the same year. From 1936 to 1939 the Eisner & Iger Studio provided a steady supply of content to publishers at the virtual onset of the comic book industry. In 1940 Eisner sold his interest in the comic book packaging company to Iger and created his most famous character, The Spirit, an insert for Sunday papers from 1940 to 1952, which continued in various forms almost uninterrupted for 60 years.

From 1942-45 he served three years during World War II as Warrant Officer in the Pentagon. There he created motivational posters and pioneered the use of cartoons for instructional purposes with the publication Army Motors. He formed American Visuals Corporation in 1948 to supply similar educational comics to clients ranging from the U.S. Government's Job Corps to General Motors and schools across America.

More than a dozen years after he was already tabbed "a national treasure" by former assistant Jules Feiffer in 1965, Eisner created a new genre: the graphic novel. He coined the term with his seminal 1978 work A Contract With God.

Eisner taught comic art classes for years at the School of Visual Arts in New York City, and authored two definitive instructional books on the medium, Comics and Sequential Art and Graphic Storytelling.

For comic book professionals, one of the highest honors in the industry is an Eisner Award, named for Eisner and given out every summer at Comic-Con International in San Diego. In May 2002 Wizard magazine named Eisner "the most influential comic artist of all time." On June 3, 2002 Eisner received a Lifetime Achievement Award form the National Federation for Jewish Culture, only the second such honor in the organization's history, presented by Pulitzer-prize winning cartoonist Art Spiegelman. He received the 1995 Milton Caniff Lifetime Achievement Award and the 1998 Reuben Award as cartoonist of the year from the National Cartoonists Society. A film documentary about Eisner's career is underway from Montilla Pictures (Andrew and Jon Cooke).

Eisner's final graphic novel, The Plot: The Secret Story of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, finished last summer, will be published this spring by W.W. Norton & Company. A career-spanning art exhibit, The Will Eisner Retrospective, will open at MOCCA (Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art) in New York City in May 2005, followed by galleries at Brigham Young University in Provo, UT, the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and possibly additional venues.

Frank Kelly Freas 1922-2005

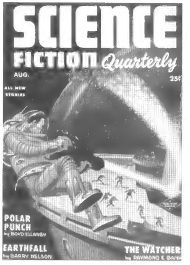
Frank Kelly Freas died in his sleep Sunday, January 2, 2005, at age 82. Freas was born on August 27, 1922, in Hornell, New York, and demonstrated artistic talent at an early age. While serving in the Pacific theater in World War II in photo reconnaissance, he passed his spare time painting beautiful women on the noses of bomber airplanes. He attended the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, and in 1950 submitted a drawing to *Weird Tales*, which sold and started him on his career as a science fiction artist. Freas' long association with John W. Campbell and *Astounding/Analog* began in 1953 and lasted through June 2001.

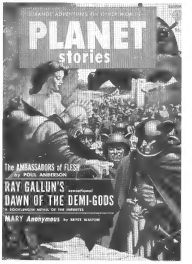
Freas, an eleven time Hugo Award winning illustrator of cover and interior art for science fiction, fantasy, advertising, and *Mad Magazine*, was active in the science fiction field from 1950 until just weeks before his death. He was an influential illustrator who produced sleek, stirring images for science fiction and fantasy books and helped shape the image of *Mad Magazine* mascot Alfred E. Newman. Kelly illustrated stories by writers such as Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, A. E. Van Vogt, Poul Anderson and Frederik Pohl. The prolific artist painted 58 covers for Laser Books and 90 for Ace.

The humorous aspects of his work landed him a job at *Mad Magazine* in 1957. His first feature was "Mad's Ink Blot Test" in #31 (Feb 1957), and he held the position of cover artist from issues #40 (Jul 1958) through #74 (Oct 1962). He also contributed many advertisement parodies and the well-known "Presenting the Bill – a great moment in medicine" from *Mad* #48 (Jul 1959).

In 1977, he wrote *Frank Kelly Freas – The Art of Science Fiction*, a personal memoir of his art. Beautifully and richly illustrated, the text chronicled his career in anecdotal style and was annotated with additional hand-written commentary. *Frank Kelly Freas – A Separate Star* came out in 1984 with a similar down-to-earth approach.

A member of First Fandom and the Dorsai Irregulars, Kelly was an official NASA mission artist and his space posters hang in the Smithsonian. He was commissioned by the Skylab I astronauts to design their crew patch and did album and CD covers for Queen. In 2000 Kelly was elected a Fellow of the International Association of Astronomical Artists. He was also presented three Chesley Awards, five Locus Poll Awards, a Skylark Award, and a Retro Hugo during his career.





Book Review

[continued from page 76]

been interviewed in another collection from Titan Books entitled *Artists on Comics Art*, edited by Mark Salisbury. Visit www.titanbooks.com for more details of this and their other highly recommended companion anthology, *Writers on Comics Scriptwriting*. By the way, another writer missing from the book is DeFalco (maybe he could have interviewed himself?), although he does cover some of his contributions in his interview with close collaborator Ron Frenz.

The great Spider-artists Gil Kane and Ross Andru are not included, as they are sadly no longer with us. Still, the writers they collaborated with do them justice, with Andru singled out for some much-deserved praise. It is revealing though that both Conway and Wein mention how Kane would often fall behind the plot as he laid out the story, so that by the end scenes would become truncated or have to be dropped to fit into the available number of pages. Wein recalls times when this would even squeeze out the very scene chosen for the front cover.

The most obvious "Missing Man" here is of course Steve Ditko. A private man, he has preferred to avoid interviews and to let the work and his occasional essays speak for him. I was somewhat surprised to read that, after all these years, Stan Lee still seems genuinely baffled at Ditko's departure and what drove him to it. Lee and Romita were a much smoother partnership but Romita sums up his "plotting sessions" by saying: "The truth is, Stan and I never really decided on anything."

Lee admits here that he has always wanted Ditko to return and produce Spider-Man again, but according to Lee, on the one occasion when he asked him, Ditko insisted that he would not work on the character again unless he was paid a royalty on the character. The thorny question of who created what is addressed by Lee, who concedes, not for the first time, that Ditko is the co-creator of Spider-Man. He says it needed Ditko "to transform him from an idea into artwork on paper…to design the look of the character." But clearly Lee's glowing acknowledgement of the vital input of artists like Ditko, Kirby, Everett and others to the Marvel pantheon is tempered by his admission: "…in my heart of hearts, I still feel that the guy who comes up with the original idea for something is the guy who created it, especially if he's the guy who develops the name and the personality and the gimmicks behind the character." It is highly unlikely that we will ever see Lee and Ditko reunited on their greatest co-creation again.

But in this new century, the tales of the assorted versions of Spider-Man and his ever-spiraling cast look set to captivate all kinds of readers for many more years ahead. It is clear that for every writer and artist, their time spent chronicling Spider-Man's assorted exploits and incarnations has been a highpoint in their careers. Wein sums it up well: "Let's say that a full set of Spider-Man comics measures three feet on a bookshelf. Part of the joy I get from my time on *Amazing* is looking at those three feet and knowing that I wrote these two inches right here—two inches in which I was part of the amazing history of this contemporary fantasy. I have contributed to the lore of an ongoing American myth, and that's a great feeling." DeFalco has done a brilliant job of bringing together so many of these modern mythmakers, past and present, into one book of fascinating conversations.

CD Review

[continued from page 77]

You wouldn't think of the bare-faced Man of Steel, Superman, as belonging on a collection featuring Masked Marvels. Ordinarily, he would not. But when Batman guest-stars in a rousing 11-part story from 1948, how could anyone complain?

"Batman's Great Mystery" is really the riddle of "Where is Batman?" After the Caped Crusader disappears, Robin enlists the Man of Steel to find him. The convoluted storyline leads to a gang of isolationist bigots—a flourish no doubt the work of legendary Superman radio and TV producer Robert Maxwell—who appears to have co-opted Batman into their nakedly anti-foreigner cause. When Alfred the butler informs Superman that Robin too has vanished, the Man of Steel turns to Perry White—who on radio had left the *Daily Planet* to be the Mayor of Metropolis!

Bud Collyer plays Clark Kent/Superman opposite future film actor Gary (Batman) Merrill and Ronald (Robin) Liss in this saga taken directly from pristine transcription disks discovered in the DC corporate archives.

As fascinating as a project like *Masked Marvels* is, I doubt it would hold the listener's attention half so much if it hadn't come with a profusely-illustrated 32-page booklet by former DC colorist-turned-OTR-archivist Anthony Tollin. He packs a ton of fascinating behind-the-scenes cast and production information into a tight little package, enhancing the listening enjoyment far beyond the performances.

For instance, Tollin tells us that during the Orson Welles' *Shadow* period, the haunting opening narration was really original Shadow Frank Readick, whose nasty voice and sinister laugh were considered signature. Tollin reveals that Green Lama creator Ken Crossen co-authored the radio series with William Froug, and adapted the kickoff episode from his own 1940 pulp novel, *The Man Who Never Existed*. (Too bad only four *Green Lama* shows survive.)

Virtually every voice actor is identified, and it's fun to track who doubles for which characters. I was struck by the delicious fact that during the retelling of the Lone Ranger's origin, it was the voice of the Green Hornet, Al Hodge, who played the Ranger's martyred brother, Captain Reid. And later, John Todd, who was Tonto, doubled for the adult Dan Reid on the Hornet's own program. It was also fascinating to learn that in "Heading North," the family name of Reid was first assigned to the Texas Ranger Captain who was ambushed at Bryant's Gap—which had been called Grant's Pass before this.

Trivia? I consider it history. And that's exactly what makes *Masked Marvels* such a cool, if not indispensable, collection. It's the best example of Old-Time Radio memorabilia you'll find in one package.

My only quibbles center on what was left out: rare episodes of other comics-inspired Masked Marvels like the Black Hood and the Blue Beetle. And, although he's not really masked, DC's Blackhawk had his own radio show for a while. I'd like to hear that one. For that matter, what about including one of the two *Batman* radio pilots and some of the more obscure Orson Welles *Shadow* episodes rumored to be floating around out there?

OTR fans can only hope for a *Masked Marvels II*…if not a *III*…

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Heritage is charging into the New Year with our biggest and best event in ages!

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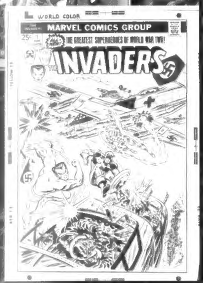
Marvel Comics #1
CGC-graded GD 2.0
cream to off-white pages

Wendy Pini
Elfquest: Swordswoman in the Swamp
Original Art

Boris Vallejo
"The City" Preliminary Paperback Book Cover
Original Art

Amazing Spider-Man #1
CGC-graded NM 9.4
off-white pages



John Romita, Sr.
Invaders #1 Cover
Original Art

Dave Cockrum
Giant-Sized X-Men #1, page 26
Original Art

Iger Shop
Phantom Lady #5 Cover
Original Art

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